



DANCE
VICTORIA
THE WORLD'S BEST DANCE

Catch up with Dancer Rayn Cook-Thomas

Rayn Cook-Thomas recently completed his second year in York University's BFA Dance Program remotely because of COVID-19. Twice a week, he biked to Dance Victoria Studios, giving himself 15 to 20 minutes to warm up before his ballet class started at 8:45 am in Toronto/5:45 am in Victoria. We caught up with Rayn to learn how Dance Victoria's [free studio access program](#) helped him stay connected to faculty and students.

Besides having more space in which to move, how did taking class in Dance Victoria's studios enhance your online dance training?

Dancing at Dance Victoria allowed me to create rituals for my dance practice. Having to trek across town, I had to establish a steady wake-up time, a well-rounded warm up, and prepare proper nutrition for my classes, a much more proactive dance experience than rolling out of bed and into class, like I would have if I had to dance from home.

How did you stay motivated to take class at 5:45 am?

I stayed motivated by optimizing my physical and mental health. As the global pandemic takes its toll on the world, dance is a space where the unsteady, unpredictable world can be managed. Where imbalance takes place out of the studio, I can find balance and equilibrium in the studio, on my leg, and through my movement. By seeking reasonable stability outside the studio, like good sleep, food, and relaxation/recovery, I can make it to the studio in good health and embrace the world of dance that is so healing.

Were you able to experience a sense of community and connect with faculty/students in Toronto, even though you were here in Victoria by yourself?

Establishing community proves very challenging when attending online classes. However, having a reason to come together opened the door for communication and connection. Being from Victoria, it can be hard to connect with those across Canada and the world, but seeing my colleagues everyday let me reach out and interact with my classmates to discuss our experiences and hopes for the years to come.

What have you learned about yourself, as an emerging dance artist, during the pandemic?

I've learned most my passion and commitment to dance. Having the discipline to attend 5:45 am classes all year, during the coldest months of the season, is not something I would have believed possible until this year. Under normal circumstances, I usually notice the best days, where I feel most successful; yet, this year became about feeling the worst days, where I felt unsuccessful. It became about showing up and doing the work on the cruellest days that I reflected on my strength, desire, and pledge to dance.

In addition to taking technique classes online, in what other ways has your dance program adapted because of COVID-19? (For example, has dance film become more prominent?)

My school adapted choreography and performance opportunities by shifting to Dance for Camera. I was able to explore this in my final project, *wild* (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h2FS3J0f9a8&t=1s>). Other than shifting to synchronous Zoom classes, the differences were not extraordinarily large. For instance, the fashion of teaching a ballet class fits well into Zoom. Using a large vocabulary of terms for barre and centre work, the teaching and learning process remains similar to in-person classes.

What does Fall 2021 look like for your studies?

York University has approved my technique classes for in-person, which means I am looking forward to returning to school in the Fall. I also auditioned for the York Dance Ensemble, and am excited to hear back on a decision, which would be an additional opportunity for the 2021/22 school year. Of course, with the ever-changing world of the global pandemic, plans can never be certain, but I will remain optimistic for as long as I can.

You can read more about Rayn Cook-Thomas and how other dance students are adapting during the pandemic in this [article by The Dance Current](#).