

Interview with Stacy West, Artistic Director

What can audiences expect to see at a MADCO concert?

MADCO audiences can expect to be entertained. It is very important to us that the audiences like what we do. Modern dance sometimes has a reputation for being boring, too deep or self indulgent. The MADCO dancers are amazing athletes. We like to show off that athleticism in the performances we do. Because we are a repertory company the work is very versatile. Music is also very important to us. We love music that makes audiences want to get up and join us. MADCO is a great company for people who love theatre and music but aren't sure if they like dance.

What does it mean to be a repertory company?

MADCO is a repertory company which means we collect works from a variety of guest choreographers from across the country. Some dance companies mostly perform the work of the Artistic Director but MADCO performs work created for the company by many, many different choreographers. I usually compare us to an art museum but instead of collecting and showing paintings or sculptures, we collect and show dances. I think it's fun to watch a rep company because you never know what you are going to get. There is usually something for everyone.

The East and West Coasts have always had a reputation for attracting high quality artists and dance companies. What is it like to be a contemporary dance company in the Midwest?

It is true that the coasts have always had this reputation. MADCO was founded in 1976 because there were so many dancers who were being trained at colleges in St. Louis but after graduation the only choice was for them to move to New York or LA. MADCO was created based on the belief that a city the size of St. Louis deserved to have artists living and working here and artists deserved the opportunity to have choices about where they wanted to live. Today, dancers have so many more choices. New York and LA are definitely not the only places to be for great dance. There are regional companies thriving in almost every major city and MADCO is one of them. We do work outside of St. Louis but we are proud to call it home."

If there are many choices of places for dancers to work, what attracts dancers to MADCO?

MADCO is a great place for dancers. The field is very competitive, especially for women. Most dancers begin auditioning for a variety of companies their senior year in college. Many dance companies operate on a "pick-up" basis meaning they hire dancers as needed for projects. MADCO dancers are on a 10-month contract during which they have daily technique classes, work with guest artists, and teach a variety of MADCO's education programs. The company rehearses and performs in the beautiful Touhill Performing Arts Center and MADCO dancers substitute teach and set choreography on students at the university. MADCO also provides access to physical therapy and personal training at a very low cost. St. Louis is attractive to young dancers because it is a mid-sized city and the cost of living is low compared to many other places. Each year I have the great opportunity to see some of the best young dancers in

the country and invite them to work with MADCO. Many of them stay with MADCO for years and end up making St. Louis their permanent home. I've been here 21 years now!

What advice do you have for young dancers who are making their way into the professional world of dance?

Don't be arrogant. No matter how much you think you know and no matter how good you are there is always more to learn. I would rather work with a less talented dancer who has a great attitude and work ethic than one who thinks they know everything.

What are your hopes for MADCO's future?

It is so difficult for arts organizations to survive in the long run. MADCO's co-founders did an amazing job when they set up the company. They didn't name it after themselves which suggested hope for longevity and they were a rep company from the very beginning – so nothing was too tied up in one person making or breaking the operation. I have served as the Executive and Artistic Director since 1994. My hope is that MADCO survives well beyond any one person, including me!