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## **TAKING THE LEAD AND ALSO BEING TAUGHT** **REVIEW ABOUT THE BOOK TAKING THE LEAD,** **MEMOIR OF A DANCING LIFE**

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Dulaine, P. (2016). *Taking the Lead, Memoir of a Dancing Life*.  
Dancing Without Borders Press. 239 p.

Dancers and civilians interested in the art of dance can get acquainted with the work of prominent personalities of ballet, modern dance and Hungarian folk dance through numerous publications, articles, books and Internet entries. However, we have undeservedly little information about successful artists and dance teachers who have achieved significant results in the field of ballroom dancing, although there are some whose activities are worth finding out about and monitoring. Such is Pierre Dulaine (originally known as Peter Gordon Heney), to whom the film *Take te Lead* drew the attention of lovers of dance films.

In the first chapters of the biographical book based on interviews, supplemented with personal photographs, he speaks in detail about his childhood experiences, his career as a dancer, his career as a competitor, his partners and his work experience. In the second part of the work we can read about the creation of his program, its fields, the importance of his method, his effectiveness, his filming and his future plans. We can also learn about his high degree of pedagogical awareness, professional commitment and deep humanism, all adding up to an authentic oeuvre. His activities cover three main areas: his own career as a dancer, his work as a school-creating dance teacher, and the therapeutic application of dance. He was born in Jaffa in 1944 as the child of an Irish father and a Palestinian mother. He lived with his family in Amman, attending a Catholic school. At the age of 6, they moved to Birmingham, England. The family was poor, he also had to take a job. Supported by his mother and opposed by his father, he attended a dance school where he soon became a teacher as well.

He qualified as a dance teacher at the age of 18 and became a member of the International Association of Dance Teachers. The first time he got a glimpse into the world of dance competition, he was so impressed that he decided he would definitely be a champion one day. He participated in many competitions with his dance partners, travelled all over the world, and became a celebrated dancer. At the age of 23, he was at the forefront of the dance world, appearing in TV shows and giving interviews. An Australian-born famous dancer, John DelRoy, a senior Russian ballet dancer, Valentin Zeglovsky, and John Rudis from Greece, contributed to his success as coaches.

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While constantly developing his knowledge and technique, he took part in ballet and jazz classes, mastered various dance genres and dance styles. He arrived in New York in 1971, where he has been living ever since. After winning the biggest competition in the ballroom dance world in Blackpool for the third time, Dulaine was determined to end his competition career and devote his full time to teaching. He took over the management of a well-functioning dance studio in New Jersey, which he continued to operate as the Dulaine Dance Center. He gave private and group lessons and taught ballet dancers at the Brooklyn Academy of Music at the invitation of the New York City Ballet director. On the 15th anniversary of one of the oldest dance festivals in the US, he held a ballroom dance program for modern dancers.

The idea of founding a dance theater marked a new stage in his career, which he managed to realize. In October 1984, his American Ballroom Theater debuted – a non-profit, donated organization. In one of his performances, he was seen by one of Broadway's famous directors and choreographers, and was invited to perform in the male role of Grand Hotel. Having conquered the dance floor and the stage, he set himself a new goal: to fight against religious, social, racial discrimination and to eliminate prejudice with his own means: dance. He visited several school principals with his ideas related to dance teaching. He tried to convince them how useful his program was for 10-11 year olds. He explained that he did not want to train professional dancers, but to teach politeness and respect, develop self-confidence, and his method can serve as a model of behavior. In addition to mastering the material of the dances, they meet guest artists in the sessions, watch dance videos, and practice the ability how to collaborate. At the end of the school year, school teams compete in front of a jury. The name of the event - Colors of the Rainbow – refers to the diversity of participants in terms of ethnicity and skin color.

In 1994, Dancing Classrooms (hereinafter referred to as DC) was launched at Dulaine's initiative in two public schools and became increasingly popular. He re-trained dancers from his own studios to meet the needs of increasing student numbers. The DC Academy at weekends was set up for those who wanted to continue dancing after the course. The most committed and promising students can further develop their artistic skills in the Youth DC Association of Young Students. As part of this, they can take part in international dance festivals, where they can meet students from other cities and foreign cultures.

His pedagogical achievements are justified by the fact that since the beginning of DC, more than 500,000 young people have joined the program, the sense of which was defined by Dulaine as respect and compassion, teacher's presence, creating a safe place, command and control, language: body and verbal, a sense of humor and joyfulness. He realized his ideas with great professional knowledge, humility, professionalism, conscientiousness, consistent work. His method is elaborated which involves a conscious, planned pedagogical process, which is a procedure based on developmental psychology, sociology, pedagogy, psychology, social psychology.

Its impact has been studied through research, and surveys have reported positive changes in all areas. After a series of ten-week sessions, school atmosphere and student performance improved, behavioral problems declined, and non-attendance decreased. It was observed that the young people participating in the program

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had better social skills, more self-confidence by the end of the course. As a result of increased physical activity and exercise, their coordination and dancing skills developed. It helped students overcome social problems, made it easier to contact the opposite sex, and helped them overcome their anxieties and fears. The book highlights the responsibilities and opportunities of the dance teacher in the field of personality formation.

The program became more widespread beyond schools: in 2008, it began to gain a foothold in health care at a private psychiatric clinic in Switzerland, and has since been introduced as Dancing Communities in local hospitals with psychiatric wards, some public hospitals, and local community centers in Geneva. As a result, the doctor-patient relationship has changed. Following the publication of the book, working with patients with post-traumatic stress at a hospital in Manhattan has proven that dance reduces stress, improves social relationships, the zest for life, and both physical and mental health. He also taught ballroom dancing to children, young people and their families who need special treatment: in 2010, at Gateway Academy, people with autism and people with Asperger's syndrome who find it particularly difficult to touch another person. In 2014, he worked in Nashville with Down Syndrome people, whose diligence, perseverance, and loving affection made a deep impression on him.

In Phoenix, Arizona, he held a series of sessions at an adult homeless shelter, which resulted in many being able to get a job and live a normal life again.

He also made his dream come true: Jewish, Muslim and Christian children dance with each other in Jaffa through his program. Those who do not have physical contact with people of the opposite sex, another religion, or social background. The closing event was held at the end of the first course, with the participation of 140 students in front of an audience of eight hundred.

In 2013, two Catholic and two Protestant schools in Belfast introduced DC as a pilot program, resulting in team dancing at a competition at the end of a series of classes. In 2015, he launched his program in five schools in Berlin. The seincluded mixed religion, Jewish, Muslim, and Christian ones. He held a series of condensed and intensive sessions that resulted in overcoming religious and racial differences.

The popularity of the program is shown by the fact that in Beirut, at the invitation of Lebanon TV, he was asked to be member of the jury on the show *So You Think You Can Dance*. In the meantime he received the Ballroom Dance Federation Award in London.

His program also aroused the interest of the film industry. In 2005, *Mad Hot Ballroom* was shot as the work of Dianne Houston, a Los Angeles screenwriter. On April 7, 2006, *Take the Lead* was unveiled, with which he became famous overnight. In 2013, the Documentary *Dancing in Jaffa* was completed, which had a chance to be nominated for an Oscar, but did not receive enough support. In the fall of 2014, he was nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize on Facebook. Here he received support from forty-five US states and sixty-five countries.

Nowadays, due to the growing wave of violence in the world and in our immediate environment, it can be relevant to learn about Dulaine's activities, with which he has

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achieved documented success in developing tolerant behavior towards OTHERS. It demonstrated how individuals of different ages, health status, different socio-cultural backgrounds, social strata and religious orientations are able to act along the same interests (dance), for a common goal (production), overcoming individual resentments (prejudice) and creating new values.

I heartily recommend the book *Taking the Lead, Memoir of a Dancing Life* to all dancers, prospective and practicing dance teachers alike and the afore mentioned films, trusting that in addition to pleasant entertainment, it also provides useful methodological ideas and food for thought.

Dulaine, P. (2016). *Taking the Lead, Memoir of a Dancing Life*. Dancing Without Borders Press. 239 p.

**Movies:**

Agrelo, M. (Director). (2005). *Mad Hot Ballroom* [Film]. Paramount.

Friedlander, L. (Director). (2006). *Take the Lead* [Film]. New Line Cinema.

Medalia, H. (Director). (2014). *Dancing in Jaffa* [Film]. IFC Independent Film.