

## **Alcine J. Wiltz III: A Lifetime of Practice**

### **“Deepening to Release”**

#### **Dance Teaching Principles developed over 52+ years (1964-2016)**

- 1. Invitation to Join the Ride/Dialogue**
- 2. Keys: Attention/Focus/Application**
- 3. Riding the Change: Clarity and Cueing**
- 4. Students First**
- 5. Choreography Connected to Teaching**

Alcine reflects on his 52+ years as a movement coach and teacher. Sharing and giving are the drivers underlying his Dance Teaching Principles. He invites all movers into the sacred studio space to join him for a dialogue of intimacy and exploration. Alcine realized that the students’ depth of experience when connecting with instruction is not measured in time, but in attention and focus and thoughtful application. In testimonials gathered, his students share epiphany moments, whether impacted by years of Alcine’s influence or short intensive coaching sessions. Alcine impacts his students with a humanity that profoundly reaches the learner: if the learner is ready to receive the lesson. The following sections are examples of intentional movement coaching approaches for Alcine. His goal is for each learner to deepen a personal practice, ultimately allowing for release and joy.

## 1. Invitation to Join the Ride/Dialogue

When Alcine asks movers to "join the ride, he is encouraging them to connect to a spirituality within artistic practice. He is asking them to pay attention to where they are and who they are. The desired outcome is peace that can be life giving and life affirming. For Alcine dance/movement training connects the individual to a committed community of sharing: a specific engagement in time and space for working with and yielding to each other. As humans are always craving connectivity, Alcine's invitation to "join the ride" welcomes the individual to a collective synergy created when movers become lost inside of the work. This community has its own identity, members, language, phrasing, form and rituals. The experience of a collective synergy is what Alcine invites the mover to join when he says "join the ride." The ticket of admission for "riding" is the willingness to "Let Go".

The philosophy behind Alcine's "letting go" can be traced to his Catholic upbringing specific to his current celebration of the values practiced by St. Francis of Assisi. The studio work offers a space with a welcoming permission for each person to tell their story. Each dancer's process can be a pilgrimage for finding and communicating their deepest truths: grace, humility, authenticity, and joy. When dance is practiced as a ritual, the mover takes on a voyage of discovery. St. Francis of Assisi reminds us "to start by doing what is necessary, then do what is possible, and suddenly you are doing the impossible." As ritual practice in a dance studio is sacred, the community of movers gather in ritual and discovery together. It is an inner pilgrimage that never ends. Each day offers a new opportunity.

All movers have embodied their stories. As we try to make art, we find a distinct relationship between beauty and the heart's search as meaning seekers. As Ian Morgan Cron says in his book, "Chasing Francis A Pilgrim's Tale", we approach our body practices unconsciously hoping it will move us one step further on the journey towards answering the questions: "Why am I here?" He encourages us to see that the arts can awaken the awareness of the sacred sleeping in the basement of the postmodern imagination. Dance is a spiritual language that communicates truths that human language does not have words to express. But spirituality is private. So how does a teacher reconcile how much private to share in the art of publicly teaching?

For Alcine, "joining the ride" is a complex invitation of daily practice and awareness, a celebration of our poetic expressed in metaphor and art making. No one human knows where a pilgrimage is going to take them. However, deepening into self to find the release affords the journeyer with an ultimate goal: joy.

Alcine took no educational teaching methods course. No one person influenced him. His teaching came from an amalgamation of his life experience. His willingness to keep exploring ways of teaching is what has him now continuing to enjoy teaching.

He offers:

"I seem to be more interested in my teaching than my choreography. Teaching is always the driving factor."

Alcine agrees with Ian Morgan Cron that dialoging is our authentic voice. The power of community is felt in dancing and living more simply. Abstract verbal and movement metaphors are stealth ways into experiences that can become holistic habits, joyful and mindful expressions.

As Alcine reflects on meaning making, he is reminded of Wendell Berry who states that the significance - and ultimately the quality - of the work we do is determined by our understanding of the story in which we are taking part. Human beings are incurable symbol makers. We love ceremony and even pageantry. It awakens our wills and moves us to action.

Alcine's former and current students reported Alcine's teaching qualities that they experienced when accepting his invitation to "join the ride":

- Cheerful
- To the point
- Courteous
- Autobiographical
- Performative
- Spontaneous
- Genuine
- Transformative – rather than informational
- Peaceful
- Healing
- Uniting broken parts
- Connecting all to community
- Leadership as service to the group
- Rejecting negatives
- Heightened awareness to who we are in this world

By asking the students to "join the ride", Alcine takes the movement materials beyond counting one-two-three...connecting the preverbal dots. When you enter a Wiltz movement or dance technique class, there is "something" to enter. It is an invitation to a dialogue reflecting a

“series of duets” between the movers, themselves, classroom dancers, the instructor, the constant space, the rhythm, dynamics, weight, flow, energy: all participants dialoging in that particular moment in time. To “take someone on a ride, is to invite them to join in rather than to duplicate the movement experience.” Alcine, with simple cues, asks the class to integrate elements of the experience with intention and clarity.

## **2. Keys: Attention/Focus/Application**

Alcine’s intentional instruction follows several “keys” for unlocking movement habits. His goal is to prepare the human instrument to make stylistic choices in specific art forms with integration and ease. When the student enters movement to discover choices, Alcine asks questions and offers cues for eliciting awareness and change. It is his intention to “plant seeds” in each movement lesson and build momentum over time for the mover to understand their specific instrument. These processes are not unique to Alcine, but are supported in a 2016 dissertation from York University, Toronto Canada by Dr. Tonya Berg: *Kinesthetic Collaboration: Exploring Kinesthetic Dialogue In An Embodied Student-Teacher Relationship*. Similar findings I discovered in the work of Alcine Wiltz. Some highlights are as follows:

- Proprioception: Feeling Mind/Body connection/communication/kinesiology/kinetics phrasing.
- Verbal and nonverbal communication between teacher and student addressing memory through tactile corrections, teaching strategies, kinesthetic dialogues, metaphors and rhythmic language.

- Kinesthetic collaboration entails the respectful relationship between student and teacher, silent work, reference to the process, care for each other, building upon strengths, reducing specific bodily tensions, and self-cuing by practicing choices made for change.
- Kinesthetic dialogues between teacher and student is a communication and a collaboration that encourages subtle changes of somatic sensation with the tools of touch and imagery.
- The student adapts the movement changes to their own body.
- The observable results of previously experienced kinesthetic collaboration is then embodied and learned.
- The process is based on empathy affecting the teacher and the student. The transmission of kinesthetic embodiment of movement choices produce a desired aesthetically pleasing result.
- This pedagogical tool offers a reciprocal and responsive relationship between Alcine and the student engagement, and applied knowledge to the individual moving body for integrated results into their motor repertoire.
- Alcine's kinesthetic dialogue is a communication method - originated and offered intuitively and intentionally.

His attention to application often offers points of focus (considered as his act of "planting seeds") in the class opportunities through the following foci. These "seeds" become the lesson focus and accumulate over time.

- Understanding the foot
- Relationship of body parts
- Connections among the joints
- Articulation of the skeleton
- Proprioception of the actual moving muscles
- Articulate the bones at the joint focus
- Landings
- Contralateral connections
- Sending and receiving of the weight

**Keys (language) used while teaching:**

The following language is taken directly from transcripts of his actual teaching of MA Opera candidates (University of Maryland College Park) and BFA dance students (Towson University) (2014-2016):

- Listen to your own point of view.
- Attend to anything that speaks to your instrument
- There is no wrong way
- Do not be intimidated by anyone
- You just keep listening through time
- A balanced state is the goal
- Try to find these principles as you can...the cursive writing of under and over curves
- Find your own rhythms. What is your natural stride?
- Walk with bean bags on your head, gently lifting the skull and freeing the neck
- Practicing allowing the foot to receive the weight and find the tripod points
- Use the pelvic floor so that you can glide over the foot
- Take the weight on the lateral side of the foot initially
- Swing the femur from the hip sockets as you move forward
- Focus on the medial side of the foot when sending your weight
- Ribs react to the initiation of the head of the femur
- Fall and swing allows the limbs to yield to gravity and swing into motion
- Walk a slower tempo
- Use the curves of your spine: cervical, thoracic, lumbar as a little seahorse with a ripple effect

- Dance is like cursive writing---through the loops
- Initiate from the gentle skull frees the cervical into the thoracic and into the lumbar
- Upper spine is the imitation of directions, but the actual shift comes from the pelvis...all of this happens in a sequence and happens 1/100 of a second so don't dally!

Thigh sockets: the head of the femur and the acetabulum

- Work closer to your center
- It's not the edges, it's the internal
- Keep the bones in their joints
- Soften behind the knees and move into the foot
- Let the top of the head of the femur yield to gravity
- Sit bones connect to front of the heel
- What matters is the shift of weight
- 26 bones in the foot are as marbles in a sock
- Soften through the hip, knee and ankle on the landings
- Sending and receiving (of weight)
- Heel separates from the foot structure
- Inner spiral of the legs
- Going into the ground ...you are lifted
- Pelvic floor attempts frequently in the initial stages to offer a three part phrase with the metaphor of serving bowls of soup
- Feel the suction cup structure of the foot (lateral, medial, transverse arches) rather than the toe, ball, heel
- Under and over curves have a momentum like surfing

Shoulder pocket in the depth of your shoulder

- Drop the counterweight of the scapular and allow the clavicle to open
- Your sternum bone is responding to the thoracic curve, the ribs and shoulders
- Find the movement of the sides of your body in breath
- The back is what support us
- Allow the skull to lift and release the jaw and lips
- Think of the space behind your ears, the mastoid process, and listen behind you
- Keep the sense of lightness in the skull
- Simple port de bra begins with drop of scapula, open the clavicle then articulate humerus in shoulder

Ongoing instructions:

- Keep renewing the body ...find recuperation moments in the body to sustain the movement
- Move the back space
- Yield to the audience and receive them



**Alcine's Initial thoughts in the Studio:**

"I encourage movers to begin to become aware of that initial impulse of thought focused on a specific part of the body; to sense the natural response in the muscles. This focuses on the very beginning relationships around the neck and skull."

"The focus of instruction is a preset before the movement begins. It allows awareness to responses of thought. It follows the attention to the neurological synapses as when they were developing early in life and how they were designed to work. I offer some cue, just a thought that begins a change. This change has to happen with our breathing."

"I create a tactile sensation. One half of the students get it. It is subtle and you really must quiet down....focus and listen to self in order to experience that shift of energy that travels. It's not a "do"; it's an idea. There are so many ways of approaching this work, through somatic forms, that initial thought prior to movement allows the muscles to articulate a change in position."

"It is like the beginning of a phrase, a new breath ...a change...a significant change....a release to begin. Deepening to release....this is the thought process. To be aware, but then the idea and action becomes unconsciousness. If a student knows it is a part of the

process, they can let go. Letting the ego go also requires the person to allow for themselves to get out of the way. You don't have to drive the bus. The body has its own intelligence. We need to trust it, yet we often don't even hear it. "

"We (men and women) move through the space. We think 'we can do this' ... ..just do it! However, we need to enjoy the experience on a subconscious level. Why shouldn't we if we are safe and it is not restricted? What I am talking about being in transition forever? We are forever in transition....unless we grip and bind....that stops that flow."

**Alcine Seeks Authentic Communication:**

"The reasons for blockage of energy flow are ego, fear, habit, and will. I see it so often in performers. It is a form of bracing for performance. For example, actors and singers, right before they get ready to perform, tend to brace in the forearm before they are ready. Muscles hug the forearm and often are expressed in the hand, and then they believe they can make their (musical) note. The thumbs are the stars of the show. I cannot stop watching thumbs. Thumbs become connected to the space. When the radius and ulna are all locked up....not changing below the elbow, the performers arms are all locked up. Ultimately, the performers just want to get closer and closer to the audience. However, they seem to always perform up to the balcony with their skulls pulling back and down out of alignment, compressing the neck."

“The tradition of staging is to project outward. However, the real communication....dialogue in live performance... and the beauty of live performance is the exchange of energy between performers. This skill and habit must be practiced in the studio and rehearsal process. It is so easy to do projections effectively and efficiently. When done well, projection gives the viewer a sense of inclusion, rather than being performed ‘at’.”

Alcine reveals one of Alcine’s rituals to prepare for rehearsal or performance:

When Alcine prepares:

“I need to be in the specific stage space. I note the energy of the stage space and house...take the time to quiet... to be with myself.... then incorporate my interpretation of those energy fields into preparation for the upcoming performance. During my training in Erick Hawkins class, I picked-up the idea of drawing the audience onto your spine...into your backspace. So, I take a moment to find my kinesphere and then I send this energy field across the Orchestra, to the Mezzanine, to the Balcony...without throwing myself out of alignment. Then I experience a huge release. Now that I feel I am projecting, I am sending this energy backwards to project frontally. Then I relax and now I project into the balcony. I think of a vacuum cleaner sucking action and think about how I can draw the projected energy into my back space and rest it upon my spine to send it out again.”

## **Coaching Keys: Attention-Focus-Application**

“In truth, I am talking about the audience and performer as a duet. As a dancer in a work, we are engaged in more than one partner...there are many duets. There is an intimacy. When I coach dancers, I coach about the kinesphere. I make them walk about the space and image kinesphere as they pass within a range between other dancers. There is going to be shared energy. You are crossing shared energy. When the relationship is wide, dancers are sending this shared energy across shared bubbles of kinesphere. When I bring them into tighter relationships they cross many fields of energy. This training is how you adapt. We model our responses to duets and take that intimacy into trios, quartets, etc. Whether you are dancing, acting, or singing, this energy sharing moves instantly from the pedestrian to the artistic exchanges.”

Through repetition and experience, these connections happen as if by osmosis. It is felt naturally rather than by the original thought processes.

“It’s like musicality. Some people have it and some don’t have it. Not everyone will get it to a depth. But I introduce it so that this awareness to kinesthetic energy has the possibility of informing the person who listens and wants to allow change and growth. If movers have the passion, then it can be developed.”

“When these crystalized moments began within me, I dug deeper into my wants. I struggled with ideas and fit it into the movement combinations that I experienced. All this

experience changed me. I then became aware of the change. When I am comfortable with the idea and the change, I then integrated it into my teaching.”

“Basic anatomical knowledge accessible to all movers is important, but I don’t want to overly use it. It is important for all movers to experience the skeleton, but the articulation of the sequence and the many bones is really where the changes can take place. The skeleton offers the architecture of the instrument. I have always loved taking it down and placing it in different shapes. It is amazing to realize that that is YOU and that is the position you are experiencing. In the 1990s I was taking some workshops that used the skeleton in class and I so enjoyed the humorous possibilities of our instrument.”

### **Spiral is in everything**

The goal of each class is the mind/body communication for a balanced state: mind/ body that is flexible to change, to responses, to environments. Alcine invites his students to come into the space and find changes. First, he asks for a conscious awareness of the pelvis, the initial driver for locomotion/weight shifts.

“I begin with the students lying on floor. Shifting the body center initially allows awareness of the pelvic power. First, I ask the student to experience the power of proprioception: feeling and sensing. Then comes the follow through of movement that informs the sequence. Once the movement initiation is realized, the student connects the body through the actions.”

He attributes this approach to his training with Honya Holm; teaching him that the pelvis is how you arrive on the foot.

For example, Alcine accesses the pelvis power with an analogy for thinking about how the human body locomotes: a car with rear wheel drive or the power of the traveling horse.

“These are two images of the quadruped’s design...four legs/limbs. The skull indicates and initiates while the propulsion of the body through space and time is in the power of the pelvis. The dancer allows the suspension of the movement to continue the ‘ride’. In the human structure the supporting leg allows the pelvis to shift the weight through space and the suspension of weight rides through the body over the shoulder of the opposite arm for contralateral internal negotiations. The suspension uses gravity to find the other supporting foot. To balance in the suspension, the over curve propels the body weight from one hip to another and is received on the opposite shoulder. All this internal negotiation helps the body balance in the suspension during locomotion. If you watch a horse, that power is driven from the hind end from the back legs and the weight of the horse is received by the shoulders and then regroups to the back legs.”

Alcine reminds:

“How does one assess the movement of a human being? We are all different with every passing minute. The body is often using more effort than is needed and in my teaching I strive to help make the body easier and more comfortable.”

Giving feedback by dialoguing with videotaped experiences, Alcine regularly sat for about 20 minutes with each student in their first semester to talk about what they were viewing. He addresses areas needing attention for the end of semester including questions, such as, “what do you think about that pli ? ... that alignment?” This process of assessment/discussion was also used with the advanced students. It is an easier process since they had a better eye to recognize the issues needing attention. He always leaves them with “awareness homework”:  
  
3-4 things you can achieve by the end of the semester. He encourages them to always do their homework. Their bodies are always with them. “You are in the performing arts....it’s a lifestyle....your instrument is with you at all times.”

Alcine uses a great deal of language and metaphor in his teaching/coaching. He is reminded of how Erick Hawkins would start an exercise, then pause the class and talk, tell stories and give metaphors. The difference in Alcine’s approach is that he is talking while they are moving and physically places his hands on them while the verbal instruction is happening.

### **3. Riding the Change: Clarity and Cueing**

Alcine has a belief that teachers are responsible for delivering extremely clear movement intentions. Teachers are to model examples for the student that are “a little bigger than life” with great clarity. To be clear is to demonstrate movement sequences with spatial intent, rhythmic accuracy and correct phrasing. The Wiltz process of instruction by teaching with clarity is through cueing: the ability to add another kind of attention: the mind. The observable student goal is an ease of delivery and clarity of execution.

Alcine gives directions for teaching with clarity:

- Know the direction in space, the path that the movement phrase is covering
- Understand the time relationships within the movement phrase
- Attend to the beginning, any accents, and ending of phrases

Alcine's method for organizing movement material is a layered approach to cueing the student about recognizing information on space, rhythm or effort, etc.

“Students have to pay attention ‘to’ the specific cueing, but also, pay attention ‘with’ the interconnections of the principles offered. A dancer moving beyond technique and into the art of performance can pay attention to multiple cueings of the mind/body.”

He views this approach as a conversation with self, rather than doing a monologue. This daily practice is “the ride” of the class and the progress of asking the student to attend to a specific cue to enter the movement.

One of Alcine's main intentions during dance class is to get the moving bodies into a neutral, integrated, aware state.

“Students must figure out what neutral or organic is for their anatomy and neurology. If this can be achieved, then the body can then handle whatever style studied. Style shapes a consciousness for artistic movement vocabulary that then can drive a personal aesthetic in art making.”



Here dance training and art making are linked and constantly informs personal pedagogy. His attention to space, rhythm, efforts, anatomical referencing, and relationship of body parts comprise some of the multiple layers offered as cues for the students. The recognition of organic/neutral in the mind/body relationship allows the student to then begin “the ride” of experiencing and performing. The kind of student he teaches (dancer, musicians, actors, singers) informs the order of the cueing sequence. Alcine looks for “the different doorways” available to him for reaching any given specific group.

In Alcine’s approach to class via anatomy/kinesiology, varying styles in art making can be then supported: singers singing, actors acting, dancers swinging, etc.

“Recently an Asian couple came to me who would soon be married in China. They wanted to learn a social dance from America. I taught them a foxtrot. The groom was thrilled after the lesson. Before, he was made to go to classes in waltz and found them frustrating. Within a half hour with my instruction during a 2-hour session, the groom believed he could dance. He was excited to go home and rehearse.”

The Wiltz’s approach was not about the placement of the feet, but the pelvis. The simple message was: get your pelvis over your feet and your legs will fall into place.

When Alcine teaches, he enters a zone. As the “ride” begins, the setting of the space offers contemplative centering, intentional stillness, focus upon proprioceptive listening, and initiation of movement. These opportunities are available to the student. How does a teacher know if the class is learning the keys for unlocking the moving human? What is observable?

Tensions and Change is what is observable. Alcine reminds us that “the focus is on the sequential changes that follow through because of a change. There is no normal. We are adapting every hour of every day.”

The following are several testimonials from former students - stories of their experience while working with Alcine.

**Lindsey Hawkins (MADCO)**

“...I had no idea what was happening when we were asked to lie on the floor for almost an hour and move our pelvis in relation to the numbers of a clock.... Now of course, I understand the complexity of the ideas that he was sharing with us and I would just die to lie on the floor for hours and hear him talk about the pelvis, the spine, the alignment of your neck while lying on the floor, and the other million amazing things he has to say... His ability to translate that knowledge to movement principles and exercises is a rarity. The man is simply a genius.”

Humans receive gravity in the same way. Our skull, neck, shoulders, spine suspend the over curve and the under curve is redirected back to the legs again. Another intentional method is repeated regularly in Alcine’s classes. He practices the integration of verbal cuing as he prepares for his rehearsals.

“I would arrive a little before anyone else. To be in the space alone was my time to collect thoughts. Where did I hope to be going that day? Just like in a technique class. As people come to rehearsal, I noticed how they were paying attention. Through my

voice tones I would create a base energy, a rhythmic cadence of the voice with dynamic shifts. Vocal preparation is the verbalization of cueing directions for weight and pace. It is like using syllables that are not connected. They became familiar to us as a language and this is encouraging. Verbal symbols are the metaphors of cueing the dancers. The set phrases have symbolic names that then become the language of sequence and rhythm for that particular dance, with those specific dancers.”

Most students delight in his “ta-ti-ti-ta-ta” instruction of phrasing, qualities, and mixed meter time signatures. Well known by his students is the Wiltz universal sounds, cues given during class instruction “Ta ti ti ta ta, etc”. Verbal cueing is an instrumental attribute acquired because of not having access to an accompanist during his early teaching career. He found the immediacy of his own voice to be most effective cueing for rhythmic direction. He did use the Wigman drum and bongos for a while. Rhythm and space attention was instilled in Alcine from Holm. As she drilled them in simple weight transference for one hour following a modern technique class, during the intensive first two weeks he studied with her. The understanding that the foot is the base and the movement results from how you transfer your weight onto the foot has supported years of Wiltz philosophy on the simple beginnings of locomotion.

### **Lindsey Hawkins (MADCO)**

“...We did always used to laugh about how he would say the word “tah” while he was teaching...it was sort of his general word for anything he was talking about or demonstrating, often it would follow a sentence. For example, if he was demonstrating how to land from a jump, he would show and say something like “you let the ankle gate

swing open tah”.... We would then giggle and then try to do it half as well as he had just demonstrated.

### **Kathy Muenz (MADCO)**

“There were many "Alcine-isms" the students in my era used to tease Alcine about. One for sure was "coccyx to heel" or just "coccyx" in general, which was something he always talked about and a word we found amusing at that time (no other dance teachers talked about that!). Another was tee-tee-tee-ta-ta, or any other rhythmic set of consonant sounds as he rarely counted or had music but just "tee-tee-tee-ta-ta-ta'ed" us through class!”

### **4. Students First**

As a chairperson from 1968 - 2008 (40 years), his role was to serve students and faculty. He recounts how he stays with students, encouraging them to see how far they have progressed, helping them understand the problem, advising them in how they have changed. He tells them to “let go and focus on something else...we’ll come back to that issue later.”

### **Rebecca Carli-Mills (Mosele) (SIU-E)**

“Alcine is very insightful about his own process of embodiment, often working with his own patterns of alignment and movement. He has a rich somatic presence. He loves to learn and is very open to new ideas, always wanting to explore new avenues for expression of movement.”

“Alcine planted the seeds for my current profession as a Certified Advanced Rolfer®, Registered Movement Therapist and Rolf Movement® Instructor. He first introduced me to the ideas of mind-body, balanced alignment, and healthy natural movement through his dance technique classes at SIU-E. He first encouraged me to focus on "how" a movement was done: how to think about the movement, where does movement initiate, how to dance using the natural laws of gravity and alignment. It was very liberating and profound. This set me on a path that has led to a very satisfying and successful career. Alcine loves to study, so he frequently introduced new ideas to develop and refine his teaching. This established a model for me - to be a lifelong student and always work to increase and improve my understanding of my field. I think that I learned to have big plans and never underestimate a student's ability to find grace and ease when given the right kind of information.”

“Alcine is a fun-loving, creative, generous force of nature, therefore he is an inspirational teacher, choreographer and friend.”

**Kathy Muenz (SIU-E)**

“... I have followed in so many of his footsteps, dancing professionally as a concert dancer in NY, on Broadway in musicals, teaching at the university and high school levels as well as in studios, and directing and choreographing musicals. In all these endeavors, I feel the imprint of Alcine's loving hand on my back, nudging me along.”

**Phillip Lookadoo (WV Musical Theatre)**

“P.S. I'm now a partner in one of the 15 largest law firms in the world and every day, when I go ‘onstage,’ I draw on that confidence that I first learned from you. Thank you Al”

**David Jolliffe (WV Musical Theatre)**

“There’s a wonderful bit of symmetry at work as I write about Al Wiltz’s influence...I just got home from a great weekend in Washington, DC, where I took seven outstanding high school students from small towns in rural east Arkansas. We met our Senator; we went to see the historical sites; we saw excellent theatre. But we also did a lot of just talking, and our conversations were very much like those we used to have with Al when, as small-town teenagers in New Martinsville, West Virginia, we’d get to hang out with him after rehearsals. What’s your vision for yourself, Al would ask us. (Not in those clunky words, though.) What’s your vision for the world you’re going to inhabit? How are you going to make that vision come true? In these wonderful moments, I think I learned something from Al about how to affirm young people—their minds, their hearts, their art. I don’t confuse affirmation with praise, and neither did Al when he worked with us. He praised us when we did well; he affirmed us consistently.....”

**Nora Ambrosio (UMCP)**

“As an undergraduate, Alcine had much faith in me and gave me a lot of confidence in my abilities, especially as a choreographer. One year, he chose two of my dances to represent the University of Maryland at an American College Dance Festival...He also encouraged me to apply for graduate schools, and had the faith that I would one day make an excellent dance professor; again, a path that I would take.”

**Jason Lee (UMCP MA Opera)**

“Alcine is probably the most patient teacher I've ever met, and the only teacher who taught us ALL how to walk again, and use our bodies. I think above all, making us aware that we are in control of our bodies was the most valuable lesson to me, and the best way to re-learn how to sing. He really set me up in a great place to open up my voice, and my mind!”

**Jeff Haught (WV Musical Theatre)**

“The single most intense rehearsal period I have ever been involved with occurred in high school. Nothing professional or amateur in 40 years of theatre compared to the four-week basic training we endured in the 1975 cast of *‘Godspell.’* We worked from 8am till 3, blocking and choreographing...Then from 4-6 we had dance technique class, and we were back at 7 rehearsing until 10...for a month!

Every picture, every move, every moment of *‘Godspell’* was meticulously detailed, and his patience and attention to detail was astounding. He was... kind, encouraging, inventive guy that came in once a year. For the first time, we got to see the Professor,

the pedagogue, the scholar. It was one thing for us to love him; from that time on, we were in AWE of him.”

**Rob Scoggins (SIU-E and MADCO)**

“In order to understand Al as a teacher you need to consider who he was as a dancer and choreographer. Al was a beautiful dancer and performer who spent many years studying and refining his craft. This enabled him to serve as a strong example to the students. He was able to teach us about performance because he was a master of the art. As a choreographer, he was creative and unique. His dances were very theatrical, he worked great with music, and his movement invention was off the charts. I was always impressed with Al’s movement because he was able to change from dance to dance depending on his concept.

I remember taking dance composition in the morning and then watching Al create dances in the afternoon. There was always a connection between his classes and his rehearsals. Watching him craft a dance helped me synthesize the material we were learning in dance composition class. I feel so fortunate to have had Al as a teacher. I wasn’t always the easiest student to deal with and yet Al always reached out to me. He was always patient with me and gave me tough love when I needed it. I could always count on his honesty and always felt like I could count on him when the going got tough. He’s a loving man who truly cares about his students.



I've had forty great years in dance and through my journey I never forgot Al. When I started my teaching career I can remember thinking I wanted to be just like him."

**David Jolliffe (WV Musical Theatre)**

"Though my job title has always had some version of 'English teacher' in it since 1976, I continue to try to do projects that have an 'Al Wiltz' flavor. Last fall, I took a professional production of Julius Caesar, using eight actors, to six different high schools in rural Arkansas...We had only one day to rehearse and one day at each school to perform, but so often during those intense days, I would remember Al's being on the Lincoln Theatre stage with us New Martinsville kids... From Al, we got all those things (art, craft, savvy) in spades, with crystalline focus and abundant joy thrown in. What lucky kids we were!"

**Wendy Kelly (Warfield) (UMCP)**

"Dancing in Alcine's '*Musings*' in 1988 and '*Unfettered Pastimes*' in 1989... It took quite some time to embody the movements with the same quality that Alcine demonstrated and asked of us (It seemed that he could fly into the sky at any moment, yet he was also quite grounded in his movement). But I really felt it when it 'clicked,'- suddenly, the movement would feel effortless and organic... There was always some kind of relationship to the other dancers in the work, sometimes in the subtlest of ways, even when the other dancer was on the opposite side of the stage. One had to be quite

awake and aware of the entire stage, along with everyone on it, when dancing in Alcine's work."

"There is a movement phrase I can remember from '*Unfettered Pastimes*,' that seemed impossible (or at least dangerous to the body) at first, as it involved a kind of bouncing up and down from the knees while down on the floor. Of course, it was completely effortless when Alcine demonstrated it to us, but it was a real test of initiating the movement completely from the pelvis and core. When we did this according to his direction and reminders about how to approach the movement, we found that it was not only possible (without injury), but fun! Connecting the movement to what came before and after became paramount to the aesthetic effect and the health of the body as well."

"In my own dance teaching I found myself harkening back to those lessons with Alcine in Freshman Modern class, and the important foundational elements of initiating movement from the pelvis, grounding the movement in the pelvis, spiraling, and allowing the muscles to release. In my work with a Limon-based dance company, followed by a Wigman-based company, this foundation assisted me greatly. But even with my dancing days now behind me, especially when I am tired, sore, and feeling that I am dragging myself through the streets of New York City, I will suddenly remember to lift up through my pelvis and allow it to initiate my walking. Everything becomes easier and faster, and the feeling of heaviness dissipates. We did a lot of walking across the floor that freshman year. Thanks for that, Alcine!"

## 5. Choreography Connected to Teaching

Alcine was well known for his modern dance choreographies and directing. However, his work within the musical theatre and opera productions are extensive.

The following list documents the kinds of productions Alcine served as Choreographer-Director in Musical Theatre and Opera productions:

32 Staged/ Choreographed at New Martinsville, WV

(21 at High school, 11 at Lyric Theater )(over 39 years)

14 Directed/ Choreographed at Southern Illinois University at Edwardsville

3 Choreographed at West Virginia University

5 University of MD Theatre

(1 director/choreographer, 3 co-director/choreographer, 1 choreographer)

4 Directed/choreographed at a variety of sites

4 Choreographer for University of Maryland Opera Studio

Total: 58 Musical Theater and 4 Opera productions

Grand total: 62 productions

Why did Alcine choreograph? To give students the opportunities to practice their technique.

When his choreography became successful, it became something he enjoyed. There was a university concert every year and his tours needed dance works.

Success took him into MADCO, Mid-America Dance Company, a chance for me to work with

dancers who were on a more professional level. Also, MADCO kept his repertory. University dance students only stayed for a few years before graduating. MADCO allowed Alcine to see the growth and change over time in repertory. Over five or six years the growth of a particular work and the growth of the dancers allowed him the satisfaction to see the work into maturity.

“When I moved to Maryland, I began to freelance away from the university. This change was not driven from a need to create for the student. I had to feed myself because everyone was draining from me. So, choreography helped me get into that studio and make a responsive work, *‘Urban Estrangement’*, for example. Much of my choreography was about that teaching.....getting deeper and deeper....through power, release, and momentum.”

Alcine will share his strong convictions: Perhaps this is what will be his “advise” to others.

“Going to a rehearsal, one has an obligation and is a member of the group committed to the work. It is an investment of everyone’s life. To cut it short is cheating. I always enter with that sense that “we are here to go and I will go as long as you stay”. I would get every minute that I could get in a rehearsal, as long as it was productive, as long as we were moving forward. Going over time allotted was not a big deal.”

Alcine would know when a rehearsal was over by noticing a dancer’s lack of focus. When focus would begin to go, then the discipline to grow was weak. Usually energy was dispersed....no longer on the work....it began to scatter. He did not monitor his own focus. Not needed since he was driven in rehearsal. Regularly Alcine would try something different with the dancers to try

to bring back focus.

For Alcine, his choreography was important at the time. But when they were performed, it was done. Changing dancers changed everything about the nature and message of a work.

“I don’t miss choreographing concert works. It is a lot of hard work. I much prefer now focusing on the essence, the simple. It is more fulfilling. When I am able to observe an individual change, it is so much more exciting than making an audience go WOW. They leave the theatre and you never see them again.”

Alcine’s students reportedly via other faculty members called him a “Miracle Worker”. Helping and watching the transformations of students is most fulfilling now since his work choreographing for opera students nears completion.

“Teaching is simply coaching. The use of imagery with clear demonstrations offers an approach attainable for everyone. I can work with any one dancer with a specific phrase or I can take an entire class and coach them to some level of connection with the material. I see them (the class) as many and I see them as one.”

‘I never say how I am going to teach or how I am going to choreograph. I am going to the studio to do what I do----share.”

“Southern Illinois University at Edwardsville (SIUE) students coming in with ballet training would complain: ‘I need more from you....you need to push me.’ I would say:

‘You need to do the work. It is not for me to push you. I am here to present material for you, to work with, and you are here to do the work. You must work through it and pay attention and take all the cues. I am certainly willing to talk with you, but I am not willing to brow beat you. Ask me a question and I will answer it. Usually those people came out of the ballet world.’

Alcine admits:

“I am committed to everything I have done with trying to coax to coach/indicate/excite/reach potential to open up. The one person in the back of the class whose body is locked or reluctant frequently calls me to ask: Why cannot that one person get it? I am a zealot. I have to convert them, the lost lamb. I am called to gather people and say ‘what can you do?...what can you do.....?’ I have a hopeful curiosity to believe in the transformation, the beauty of seeing that movement, to see it even before they see it. And then when they see it, then it is wonderful. They can then begin to build on it. I want them to accept my gifts of awareness, not my way. But you have to understand the instrument. It is complex, ever changing, ever growing. The key to advancing (in movement transformation) is simplicity of just putting one foot in front of the other while paying attention to the moment, the people, and the project. This advice is very rich and allows you the opportunities to do such varied work.”

The older teacher in the chair instructing without demonstration is not possible from Alcine’s perspective of instruction. When he instructs, Alcine feeds students the information as he is feeling it himself. He listens internally to himself and then offers his impressions externally to

the students. What the students receive is an integrated instructor. But the cycle continues. He is also reading the students and this information is fed into the communication. The focus and intimacy is a very deep process for Alcine. The students see this invitation to enter self and movement from their instructor/guide. "People have told me that I am a good listener." Sometimes in that moment at being with that person, Alcine acknowledges that they need a place to get something out. Sometimes he can respond or not. He improvises in that conversation: choreographing the dialogue to deepen and release. Finding the joy in movement is the point.

**Concluding comments:**

During this four-year process, I constantly tried to encourage Alcine to give advice to me as a chairperson within higher education and others hoping to have a position. The following is as far as we ventured:

"As a chairperson, consider this:

- Be open minded
- Listen to your intuitive intelligence
- Allow creative interest to drive your decisions
- Consider a temperament that is not offended easily
- Acknowledge the accidents in your life that can teach you the best lessons
- Be your best teacher...allow your process and intuition to teach you
- Create and cultivate a disciplined way of living"

“Deepening to Release” was and is a life goal, literally and metaphorically, for Alcine Joseph Wiltz III. Intentionally listening at any present moment will direct you how and when to place one foot in front of the other. Finding joy with each person along the journey and sharing knowledge with care is the point of life.

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