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When Myles Thoroughgood flashes his megawatt smile, his warmth and openness are immediately striking. Behind that smile, however, is a multitalented and determined creative artist who has created a successful career out of teaching and choreographing for the stage and screen.

"I've always enjoyed dance," he says, "even as a child." An entirely new world was opened for Thoroughgood with a required dance class at William Penn High School in Philadelphia. The course, part of the school's curriculum for the communication magnet program, introduced the 16 year old to dancing and acting.

His professional career was launched

soon after, when a friend dared him to audition for a dinner theater production of *West Side Story*. "That dare turned into three years of back-to-back dinner theater engagements," he explains. While in *West Side Story*, Thoroughgood attended Philadelphia College of Performing Arts, where he studied ballet, jazz, modern and tap. An instructor at the college noticed his talent and invited him to join Waves, a newly formed jazz dance company. His electrifying performances with the troupe led to a stint with NBC's Philadelphia-based show "Evening Magazine" and to a TV contract with Viacom's syndicated "This Week's Music," shot in New York City. Intrigued, Thoroughgood moved to Los Angeles to find more on-camera work and one month later was cast in a touring production of *Satchmo*.

Following the tour, Thoroughgood decided to focus on acting and landed the lead role in the play *West Memphis Mojo*. His performance received positive press acclaim and was followed by appearances on "21 Jump Street," alongside Rosie Perez and Johnny Depp, and as a regular character on the NBC soap opera "Generations."

These experiences dancing and acting on stage and in film allowed him to bring added dimensions to his next role: choreographer. In 1989, Thoroughgood moved to Orlando after being selected to create dances for the Disney Channel's

myles togo

Stage and screen choreographer Myles Thoroughgood, the force behind the hip moves on the new Nickelodeon show "Taina," explains how he is inspired to create dances.



THOROUGHGOOD FLASHES HIS MEGAWATT SMILE.

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class actions

MYLES THOROUGHGOOD DISCUSSES CHOREOGRAPHY AND TEACHING

DT: What is your main source of inspiration in creating dances?

MT: Music. It is essential to become familiar with the music and to know its mood and accents before starting a work. The movement becomes an instrument in an orchestra that's played by the dancers. If there's a plot or storyline, I incorporate that into the dance as well. I utilize the foreground and background as frames; and when casting, I try to work with dancers who can act and express themselves facially in close-up shots, which is where we feel the relationship between the dancers, the audience and each other.

DT: What are the essentials of making it as a choreographer?

MT: Vision, style, patience and understanding.

DT: How has choreography helped your teaching?

MT: Actually, it's the opposite—teaching has helped me to explore movement potential at various levels of ability.

DT: What is your advice for teachers aspiring to become choreographers?

MT: Record your class combinations (on paper or video) and examine the continual themes, movements and isolations to discover a sense of style that you recognize.

DT: What's the difference in onscreen versus offscreen choreography?

MT: Onscreen you can have elements of surprise and you can focus the camera to magnify an isolation. Offscreen you must consider the whole picture—the patterns and placement of bodies on the stage are vital to live performances. The camera skews all formations slightly so positions may seem unbalanced from the dancers' perspective but look perfect in the monitor.

DT: What do teachers and choreographers need to know about creating dances for the camera?

MT: First of all, they should experiment by shooting their own material. In general, with a camera, you create the audience's perspective. Movement needs to be more intimate and specific, because it's magnified by the camera. That's why Fosse's movements worked so well on film.

"Mickey Mouse Club," despite the fact that he had never before choreographed for the camera. His inexperience did not hinder his success. "Myles' technical skill and clear direction truly maximized the abilities of our cast," says Jean Wiegman, the supervising producer for the show. "He had the enormous task of choreographing for 24 teenagers daily."

It was a rigorous schedule. "We had to produce three numbers a week and a music video," explains Thoroughgood. "It was a four-camera show and we had to run it from top to bottom with four takes for each number. I had about four hours rehearsal time for each song."

Although they are now household names, the dancers on the show were then unknowns with raw talent and no professional experience. Christina Aguilera, Britney Spears and *NSYNC's JC Chasez and Justin Timberlake were all dancers on the show. "It was a great training ground for these kids," says Thoroughgood. "They not only had to learn and perform the steps, but also had to be able to translate it for the camera. That's a lot to think about at once. Everyone had to learn to work together very quickly. The results are obvious. The show ran for seven years. It was definitely ahead of its time. It's unfortunate that new episodes are not being created. Look what kind of performers it was able to produce—you can see how comfortable they are performing for the camera in their current music videos."

His choreographic experience has been as varied and unique as his performing career. Thoroughgood has created movement for pop stars and musical groups, for live shows, music videos and television. He's choreographed performances at the Kennedy Center, for network television and HBO and for the musical groups *NSYNC, Skream, The Party, MMD, 4 Harmoniee, Green Spirit and Swept Way. He recently had the challenge of transforming 22 horseback riders into waltzing Antebellum Southern ladies and gentlemen for Dolly Parton's *Dollywood Dixie Stampede*, an arena show held in Tennessee, South Carolina and Missouri. "I like to discover creative ways to choreograph for different media, as well as to explore alternative spaces. As far as my choreographic style is concerned, I like to create powerful, vibrant movement that expresses personality and different moods and that reverberates beyond the experience," he says.

With his hectic schedule, Thoroughgood still finds time to participate each year in the Florida Dance Festival in Miami, where artists, teachers and students gather for a



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THOROUGHGOOD TEACHING ON THE SET OF "TAINA"

10-day interchange of classes, workshops and performances. Over the years, Thoroughgood has presented solo works, such as *Pigment* and *Made in the USA*, which was performed this year at NYC's La MaMa Theater.

He also teaches at the Miami festival, encouraging students to personalize their performance dynamic. Thoroughgood uses varied techniques to get his point across, such as playing games or doing movements backwards. To help reach the students' creative core, he asks them to picture their names written on the studio floor and then dance through the imaginary writing. Or he uses a set of numbers to get the students to dance from a starting to an ending point. "All of these exercises teach them about their own style and give them a chance to explore the space and their imagination. Another aid to learning and exploring is having students shoot videos of performances and classes so that they learn to see movement through the lens," he says.

Thoroughgood recently choreographed "Taina," a new Nickelodeon series. Maria-Perez Brown, executive producer of "Taina," was familiar with the choreographer's work on Nickelodeon's "Gullah Gullah Island" and brought him on board to work on the new series. "Taina" is about the life of Taina Morales, a 15-year-old girl who lives in Queens, NY, and attends the

fictitious Manhattan School for the Performing Arts and dreams of becoming a performer. "Taina balances the expectations of her traditional Puerto Rican family and her friends at school with her dreams of becoming a star," says Thoroughgood. "The show celebrates pop culture with a unique sense of music and style, and it's Nickelodeon's first live-action series which features a Latina female lead character."

Thoroughgood is also in demand internationally—he recently flew to South Korea to a city outside of Seoul to choreograph "Rhythms of the World," a parade of nations with eight floats representing various countries. He had the challenge of choreographing an international cast of dancers on floats and then bringing them together in one huge production number. As he exports his moves around the world, Thoroughgood continues to expand his frame of reference and remain current. "I'm interested in breaking the boundaries of contemporary movement and expanding the status quo of what is considered pop dance," he says. "Through the process, I hope to continue to discover, cultivate and develop the spectrum of dance movement." **DT**

Olivia Gale received her BA in theater and dance from Florida State University and is a longtime member of Dance Masters of America.

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