



Meet Alumni at ASA! Rebecca Needhammer and Emma Popish

"Teachers teach because they care. Teaching young people is what they do best. It requires long hours, patience, and care."

--Horace Mann

It is often said that teaching is a calling and many ASA graduates have heeded that call. Arizona School for the Arts is fortunate enough to have two former students currently in the ranks of our faculty, Rebecca Needhammer and Emma Popish. In our own version of Arts + Smarts, Rebecca is an instructor of Ballet and Modern Dance for fifth through ninth grade students while Emma teaches ninth grade Social Studies.

Teachers come to the profession in many ways. Born in Luton, England, Emma has fond memories of occasionally attending school with her aunt who was a preschool teacher and helping to organize her classroom before moving to the United States. Playing teacher as a child was a natural segue to being tapped by Laura Apperson and Maria Simiz to be a Strings Teaching Assistant during her senior year at ASA, but Emma also credits several of her teachers, including Jeff Steinert and Kristin Mailhiot, with inspiring her to become a teacher. Concurring, Rebecca believes that many of the wonderful teachers she had at ASA while she attended from 2001 to 2004, showed her what it means to be a good teacher. As a dancer, she finds teaching a good, consistent job within the dance world that also allows her to rehearse and perform.

Rebecca has a deep background in dance; she began her training at the School of Ballet Arizona at the age of five. She continued her ballet training in the Royal Academy of Dance syllabus with Mary Moe Adams and Andrew Needhammer and has been an Associate of the Royal Academy of Dance since 2009. After earning a B.A. in Liberal Arts from St. John's College in Santa Fe, New Mexico, she taught children of all ages at Northern Arizona University Community Music and Dance Academy, Yen-Li Chen School of Ballet, Dance Theater West, Phoenix Dance Academy, and the School of Ballet Arizona. While teaching at SBA, an opening became available at Arizona School for the Arts; Rebecca was a natural fit and has been teaching ASA students Ballet and Modern Dance for the past three years while remaining a member of Center Dance Ensemble. She says, "I have so many fond memories of ASA from when I was a student here. This school undoubtedly shaped who I have become and how I will continue to grow. I'm so proud to be able to carry on the tradition of creativity and scholarship."

When Emma is asked "Why ASA?", she says, "I have come back to ASA to be a part of the same team that dedicated their careers to teaching me. As an alumna I hope to encourage my students to achieve their dreams, just as past ASA teachers encouraged me to reach out for my dreams." Emma grew up in Downtown Phoenix and attended Arizona School for the Arts from sixth through twelfth grades. After graduating in 2009, she earned her Associate of Arts in Elementary Education with Highest Distinction at Phoenix College in May 2013. She then went on to earn her Bachelor of Arts in Elementary Education, Magna Cum Laude at the University of Arizona in May 2015.

Arizona School for the Arts
A COLLEGE PREPARATORY AND PERFORMING ARTS TRADITION

1410 N. 3RD ST. PHOENIX, AZ, 85004

P: 602.257.1444 | **GOASA.ORG**

While she was finishing her final semester of student teaching, Emma received a text from Laura Apperson to watch the ASA website for a teaching opening. After interviewing and preparing a demo lesson for rising eighth grade students, she has been on staff at ASA for the past six years, “Funnily enough I filled the GAPING HOLE left by fellow alum Bailey Williams!”

Becoming faculty where you were once a student can have a through the looking glass aspect. Emma remarks that even though the school has grown in the years since she and her thirty-two classmates graduated, “The student body is still reflective of so many different backgrounds, cultures, and walks of life, but most of all, the kids are still as spunky and dedicated to their passions as we were ten years ago.” What is different is her view on the arts side of the ASA model. Emma says as a student she understood the benefits of the arts and appreciated the opportunity to perform, but as a teacher, she has room-shared with orchestra for the past five years, “The arts teachers are literally amazing and I don’t think I realized until I became their peer that the opportunity to work with such dedicated and talented musicians is such a gift.” There are, however, some things that remain core values at ASA, “The culture of compassion, intellectual rigor, and value for the arts is the same.” says Rebecca.

The past year has been a challenge for all ASA teachers as they have had to learn a new method of online teaching, challenging themselves to keep the excellent standards of learning that is the pride of ASA and thinking of creative ways to teach arts over the internet. Rebecca has enjoyed the aspect of innovation since online teaching has forced her to think outside the traditional form of teaching dance, but it has also made her think about bringing dance education to all of her students equitably, “In the classroom, everyone is in the same space, often with the same materials and basically the same access to the teacher. At home, I have less control over the environment and not everyone has equal access because not everyone’s internet or home situation is the same.” Emma sees this as an opportunity to teach her students to learn through trial and error, “I am also constantly trying new things, learning from my mistakes, and owning those qualities in front of my students. I want them to see me for all that I am (the good days, the bad days, and the days when the lesson plan just flops) and in the end I just hope that we can all laugh about it in the end.” Anyone who has had Zoom mishap can relate.

Whether online or on campus, the ensuing goals of educators remain the same. “I ultimately want to give everyone an opportunity to dance and experience a serious dance education regardless of their natural abilities or their plans for a future in dance. I hope to foster an appreciation for dance and the arts and allowing students to realize that dance is for everyone.” Emma strives to be as influential as her past educators at ASA, “I hope to teach my students a little about history and a lot about their potential and worth. I want them to walk out of my classroom confident in their own skin and know that they always have someone rooting them on from the sidelines!”