

# Dancers learn on-the-spot creativity in UA classes

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Modern dance luminary Doug Varone has been working on honing his students' nimble choreographic minds at the University of Akron's dance studios.

In the second week of the Doug Varone and Dancers summer intensive, Varone, whose company is based in New York, continued to work with 17 students in his Choreographic Devices class. It was one of six classes happening simultaneously late Tuesday afternoon at Guzzetta Hall.

The 11th annual summer intensive, which UA is hosting for the first time, has drawn 60 dancers from across the United States, Mexico and Canada, plus six who've come all the way from Siberia for three weeks in Akron. More than half are in college, while the others are young professionals.

In the Choreographic Devices class, Varone was giving groups of four dancers 15 minutes to create a dance based on an early imagination game featuring an obstacle course. The dancers had each created a physical response to objects such as a piano, chair or watch that were in their way.

Each member of the small groups got a chance to serve as the choreographer, putting the others' dance phrases together in different manners. Varone was gradually diminishing the amount of time the groups had to work on each variation.

"I'm trying to get them to move fast with their brains," Varone said. "It's kind of like speed dating. When you have to kind of move fast through something, you see the essentials, and you go after that."

"This is my life," Varone said as he scurried up and down the hall barking out remaining times to groups working in two studios.

Varone himself will be doing some quick creating 7:30 p.m. Thursday at the Akron Art Museum, where the company will give a breakdown of the dance *Boats Leaving*, inspired by New York Times photos.

"It's a beautiful museum. I just have to find a safe place for the dancers to dance because it's all concrete," Varone said.

The choreographer also will create on-the-spot dance responses to the museum's Andrew Moore photography exhibit, *Detroit Disassembled*.

"When I get there, I'm going to let my intuition take over. I'm only going to allow myself 10 minutes to create," Varone said.

One person who wasn't moving quickly at the UA studio Tuesday was Patty Petronello of Arlington, Va., whose kneecap popped out of place as she was doing a jump on the third day of the intensive. She stuck around for another week, observing classes, taking notes and participating with her upper body. Her knee was in a brace and she was required to stay on crutches for 10 days.

"I've been waiting for this intensive for months, ever since I heard about it," said Petronello, a dance major at Slippery Rock University of Pennsylvania. "I'm definitely doing it next year."

Participants were selected for the summer intensive on the basis of their videos and resumes. Students range from those who are new to modern dance to those who dance in New York for a living.

Varone said UA freshman Concetta Martinez, who has recently begun studying ballet, was frustrated the first day of the modern dance workshop and questioned whether she should be in the program.

"You're looking really great — why don't you hang in?" was Varone's response.

"She's a smart lady and it's beautiful to watch everything make sense," he said of Martinez.

Each workshop participant works with Varone and eight of his dancers, plus guest instructors Merceditas Manago-Alexander and Peggy Baker. The Varone dancers rotate through teaching each class so students get the benefit of eight different perspectives in dance technique and phrase work.

Varone himself says he's going full-force from 6:30 a.m. to 10 p.m. each day, teaching and giving a variety of free public presentations highlighting his company's work. Company members also rehearse daily in preparation for performances by Doug Varone and Dancers that will kick off the Heinz Poll Summer Dance Festival June 25 and 26. The free events will begin at 8:45 p.m. at Firestone Park in Akron.

For a schedule of remaining public events at Guzzetta Hall plus live streaming of those events, see <http://www.uakron.edu/dtaa>. For more information on the Heinz Poll Summer Dance Festival, see <http://akrondancefestival.org>.

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