



# *Words We Can Dance*

*Thoughts for dance students, performers and teachers.*

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*She Dances With Him Productions*

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*To my first dance teacher,  
Antonieta Cortés Bareño.  
Your words were the first beat I learned to follow.*



## *How This Book Happened*

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When I began taking dance lessons at age fifteen, my whole world changed. Dancing provided purpose and emphasis to my life. It gave me a sense of identity and accomplishment. I loved the way my teacher inspired me. I wanted to be like her.

So, shortly after my seventeenth birthday, I found employment at a ballroom dance studio that offered free teacher training with no experience required. At the time I expected this to be just a summer job.

But that fall, I did not return to school. I had become obsessed with the idea of becoming a good dance teacher. I was spending a lot of time at the studio. I was new, so I wasn't teaching much. Instead, I trained with the other instructors, practiced a lot on my own, cleaned the mirrors, scrubbed the toilets, made the coffee, watched the other teachers teach and observed the professional dancers rehearse.

I left my parent's home and moved into a basement room in the house the directors of the studio rented in the outskirts of town. I wanted to spend my time with people who believed that teaching dance was a worthy and important career. I was living my dreams.

One morning we were all sitting in the kitchen drinking coffee. It was then that I saw it. One of the souvenir coffee mugs was covered in colorful writing. I got curious so I picked it up and read it. It was all dancing proverbs: Shaw's *Stuff of Which Art Is Made*, Einstein's *Athletes of God*, Nureyev's *We Live because* and Nietzsche's *God That Could Dance*, among others.

It dawned on me that what had made my own dance teachers so good in my eyes was the way their words were memorable, like the proverbs on the mug. So, I made it part of my everyday work to avidly listen to and study every word my instructors and coworkers uttered.

After a while, I realized that I too, could come up with memorable phrases if I just observed the student's reactions to what I said, if I listened to myself a bit more carefully and especially if I spoke with the single-minded purpose of helping my students.

Weeks turned into months and the shy, stuttering teenager with the foreign accent that I was, slowly began to morph into a competent dancer, a confident communicator and a knowledgeable dance instructor. Months turned into years of dancing, learning and teaching. Eventually I was asked by a colleague who was opening a dance school to take the job of dance teacher trainer and to help new instructors put their passion and dedication into words.

Years turned into decades and I slowly I realized the impact my words were having on my students, performers, teacher trainees and colleagues. And one day a close friend told me: "Francisco, what are you waiting for? Write all of these down. Truly, these are *Words We Can Dance*."



*Living*

*All human being come into this world as dancers.  
But only the passionate, stubborn, rebellious,  
illuminated or crazy ones  
remain dancers throughout their lives.*

*The voice inside you that says: “Dance!”  
is not your conscience. It’s your life.*

*The light of a single dance  
can illuminate a whole lifetime.*



# *Learning*

*Talent can't be seen, heard, smelled, tasted, bought,  
borrowed, copied, broken, stolen, killed or destroyed.  
It belongs in the same group of concepts  
as luck, destiny or unicorns; it doesn't exist! <sup>1</sup>*

*If you insist on using the word,  
talent is just another name  
for the desire to learn and improve.*

*When people claim to “see” talent,  
they are only seeing the effects  
of desire, perseverance and love.*

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<sup>1</sup> Inspired by Colonel Haldane's speech on luck in *The Intruders* by Stephen Coonts



*We humans are always trying  
to listen to our bodies;  
but when we dance, it is our bodies that listen to us.*

*When it comes to dancing,  
your mind may learn quicker  
but your body will always learn better.*

*Every time you take a beginner class you see not just  
what you missed the first time.  
Your teacher also sees what he missed the first time.*



# *Performing*

*Don't wait for the gold medal to be happy.  
Be happy that you can compete.*

*Never assume you have an advantage  
because you are the current champion.  
Judges look at how you dance today,  
not how you danced last week.*

*It is useless to triumph over your opponents  
if you don't vanquish yourself.*



*Practice doesn't make perfect. Practice makes habit.  
Practice and understanding make improvement.*

*Do not practice until you get it right.  
Practice until you cannot remember  
how to do it wrong.*

*Talent may sometimes dance with Luck,  
But on any given night, the best couple on the floor are  
Knowledge and Perseverance.*

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*Teaching*

*A good teacher will not impress his students  
with his dancing skill.  
But he will dazzle them  
with their learning abilities.*

*Before challenging  
the learning abilities of their students,  
good instructors think about challenging  
their own teaching abilities.*



*A lesson without a clear objective  
is a failure even before it starts.*

*A dance teacher's most important objective  
is to make the student aware of an improvement  
between the beginning and the end of the lesson.*

*In a dance lesson the plan is often  
the first victim of reality.*



*In dancing there are no bad students.  
There are only inefficient teachers.*

*Anybody can teach  
a student with good abilities to dance.  
A student without them needs a real teacher.*



## *About The Author*

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Francisco De La Calleja, author and blogger, is one of the most experienced latin dance instructors and dance teacher trainers in the Montreal (Canada) area. Although a salsa specialist, his dance experience ranges from Mexican folklore, ballet, ballet-jazz, ballroom and swing, to argentine tango, brazilian samba and even aerobics, dance fitness and rhythmic gymnastics.

He has taught over twenty-one thousand students in six different dance schools and has danced in, coached or choreographed for several dance troupes as well as movies, TV shows, sporting events, music videos and live performances including salsa Congresses in Montreal, Los Angeles, New York, Miami and Puerto Rico. He was a member of Salsa Team Canada from 2002 to 2005.

In 2015 he began a writing career which has yielded already two titles: *Words We Can Dance* and the soon to be released *She Dances Salsa... With Him!*, about the unspoken truths of learning, teaching and dancing Salsa. His next works, a compilation of dance teaching anecdotes and a training manual for Salsa and latin dance teachers are expected in late 2019 and early 2020.

You can learn more about his work and reach him through his website at [www.shedanceswithhim.com](http://www.shedanceswithhim.com)