

course—Movement I: Freshman Performance Core—is two semesters long. (He also teaches an advanced movement class for seniors.) Audiences tend to notice movement mainly when something is not right: a stride too stagey, a stance too studied, an affected pose that seems comic when that wasn't the director's intent.

"Our bodies," says Cassell, "are the material we have to work with."

The great choreographer Twyla Tharp used to open her rehearsals, Cassell says, by having her dancers "doodle" around the studio floor. As students arrive for his class, they do just that, their moves guided by motives and emotions known only to them. One may be writhing like a worm while another might curl into herself in a childlike pose. Others lurch around the floor like zombies.

Their teacher offers a basic instruction: follow your inner child. Within seconds the students are skipping, tumbling, or scooping each other up for piggyback rides. "Feel free to vocalize," says Cassell, unleashing a chorus of giggles, hoots, and ululations.

Cassell is an accomplished dancer who has performed with Ringo Starr's *Shining Time Station*, the American Mime Theatre, the Pearl Lang Dance Company, and the Palissimo Dance Theatre's Off-Broadway production of *Blind Spot*. When he speaks of dance, he wants students to transcend the concept of "steps." Much of what they're doing, he says, is overcoming a fear of ecstatic, full body involvement. He refers often to the importance of the inner child and the notion of play. His approach was honed largely by his work with young people. Cassell was program manager for Boston Ballet's Citydance, a program that pro-

"Our bodies are the material we have to work with," says CFA's Yo-EL Cassell (far right).



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ONLINE:
 Watch videos of Yo-EL Cassell helping his students discover their bodies' potential to create art and of a spontaneously generated piece of movement art at bu.edu/bostonia.

vides free movement education to more than 3,000 public school children in Boston.

Cassell speaks often of joy—in teaching, in choreographing, and of course, in dancing. Although he's a proficient lip-reader and speaker, he is hearing-impaired, and this has had a profound effect on his personal journey. He attended a school for the deaf at age three, where he took a creative movement class that encouraged students to roar like a lion. "I remember feeling alive. I remember feeling ecstatic and joyful," he says. His hearing impairment "allowed me to look at things in a different way, to connect to senses that I probably wouldn't have connected as deeply to, specifically to touch, feeling rhythm, feeling connection with each other." **SUSAN SELIGSON**

FACING PAGE: CYDNEY SCOTT (LEFT), JACKIE RICCIARDI (RIGHT); THIS PAGE: JACKIE RICCIARDI (TOP), CYDNEY SCOTT

SNAP

CANINE COMMENCEMENT

Lise Miltner (STH'17) and Gem, the Lab she spent 16 months training to be an assistance dog, on their way to the Canine Companions for Independence graduation ceremony last February. Miltner trained Gem while pursuing a Master of Divinity at the School of Theology. After nearly a year and a half, Miltner and Gem traveled to Canine Companions' Northeast Training Center in Medford, N.Y., for a formal matriculation ceremony. There, Miltner handed Gem over for advanced training.



ONLINE: Read the full story, "The Path of an Aspiring Assistance Dog," at bu.edu/bostonia.