

Community Dance



The 2007 Caroline Plummer Dance Fellow, Dr Katrina Rank, at home in the dance studio.

Australian dance practitioner and researcher Dr Katrina Rank brought her children Stirling (10) and Charlie (8) with her, but had to leave husband Grant behind in Melbourne, when she accepted the University's six-month Caroline Plummer Dance Fellowship. "That is how rare and sought after the Fellowship is," she says.

Dr Rank trained as a classical dancer at the Australian Ballet School and performed professionally in Australia and the United Kingdom, but her passion is community dance.

During her six-month tenure, Dr Rank is focusing on her study *My Body is an Etching*.

The aim of this project is to develop a three-to-five minute solo dance work, that will reveal a person's history in a way that can only be articulated by the moving body. Once that is achieved, it will be refined so that it can be taught to community groups. Dr Rank then aims to further develop her community

dance aesthetic and practice in Dunedin.

"The solo will be designed so that it can be performed with a high degree of competence and imagination by people without formal dance training."

She says community dance can be many things. Her own community work has a strong creative element and does not use known formulas to express ideas and communicate feelings.

"It doesn't necessarily use folk or ballet or jazz or tap, but rather uses movements of the body in more pedestrian ways – it plays with actions, energy, time and space to create new movement," she says.

Dr Rank says community dance practitioners tend not to be famous and that unless they are well-known performers or choreographers their work is often seen as fringe, or "other".

"Scholarships are rare in this field, so when I was awarded the Fellowship

I was excited by the opportunity to actually produce an important work and then sit down and write about it."

Back home, she only works two days a week at community dance and spends her remaining time earning a living at Deakin University as a sessional teacher and researcher, so there is little time to think and write about community dance academically.

Dr Rank says the local dance community has been extremely welcoming, the University most supportive and the Dunedin City Council proactive in promoting *My Body is an Etching* to the community.

Dr Rank returns to Melbourne in December.

The Dance Fellowship was inspired by young Otago dance student Caroline Plummer, who died from cancer in 2003 at age 24. Her parents set up a memorial trust to give ongoing life to her passionate belief in the power of dance as a medium for healing.