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Author

Puleio, Dante

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Grandma... Is That You?

How would you like to dance your way into old age, instead of fearing it? One film about hip hopping seniors might be just the inspiration you need

by Dante Puleio

What is your grandmother doing right now? What if I told you she could be a dancer, performing for 18,000 people as part of the New Jersey Nets NETSationals Senior Hip Hop Dance team? You would most likely shake your head and say, "Nope, not my grandmother," to which I would reply, "Have you seen Dori Berinstein's documentary *Gotta Dance*"? This 95-minute film follows the story of a New Jersey basketball team sponsoring a dance troupe for their halftime shows, specifically comprised of people over 60 years old. This film divulges every aspect of the premiere of the NETSational experience. It starts with the audition and leads the viewers through rehearsals and performances, to the media's and the fans' crazed response, and takes the audience to the end of the basketball season. It's a moving story of thirteen would-be dancers, baring their souls and dreams to fans and strangers all over the world.

Why should you watch this? Let me answer this by asking you another question. Where do you picture yourself as a senior citizen? If you're having a hard time answering that, it's understandable, most dancers do. For dancers, it seems the future is a blurry, scary place that tends to be placed on a shelf far out of reach, in hopes that it never comes to find us, in hopes we'll steer clear from the rigidity of age and the loss of mobility. This film helps dilute that fear. It allows the viewer to see another option for what may lie ahead. Whether we like it or not we will all be senior citizens one day, looking back on our long lost youth in dreamy nostalgia. One way to combat lingering over that scenario is by spending an afternoon being inspired by people making the choice to take a chance. They don't allow any obstacle to stand in the way of making a positive change in their lives.

Gotta Dance does exactly what documentaries are supposed to do. It lures you into understanding what it is to be in someone else's shoes, while reminding you of your own perspective. *Gotta Dance* connects you to each senior by allowing the audience to see what their lives are like and what drew them to the audition. You get a taste of the difficulties that litter the path of success for the older generation, while exposing the perspective of the younger dancers who are working with and choreographing on the senior citizen dance team. Viewers get insight about both sides, as well as a great deal of hope and inspiration.

Each part of the film demonstrates different aspects of dance world, like the amount of fun it is being a performer, the glory of the cheers, and the fulfilling validation once the hard work has been appreciated by the masses. It also lets the viewer experience the stress involved, the nerves and fears of dancing in front of 18,000 to 20,000 people. A less familiar side of the process emerges here, too, a side that younger dancers may not yet be familiar with. We begin to understand what it is to be over sixty years old, going through all of this and trying to accomplish these things for the first time. These senior hip hoppers have the same goals as the twenty-somethings but they have weaker, slower bodies and brains to pursue them with. Their motor coordination is not what it was forty years ago, which can be frustrating. The young dancers choreographing on them experience frustration as well. They may sympathize with these seniors,

but the NETS Corporation still expects an exciting show. The dramatic tug between these two aspects makes you appreciate all that they are able to accomplish by the end.

Why should you take time away from the instant validation and the promised five jolts per minute while Snapchatting, YouTubing, Instagramming, and Facebooking? When you think back on your social media experience, how many updates, pictures of people's food and vacations do you remember? How many YouTube videos truly stay with you forever? Once we see a dancer on pointe balance on someone's head for the tenth time, we start to become numb to what is possible. Then there are films that will stay with you forever, and *Gotta Dance* is one of these. It allows you to re-familiarize yourself with the human spirit and condition. It's riveting to witness the beauty and wisdom that comes with age. You will be amazed watching a small group of senior citizens channeling those qualities and encouraging one another to step outside their comfort zones. Your heart and mind will soar as you see a school teacher, retired professionals, legal secretaries, a grandfather, and even a great-grandmother get down and dance their booties off on the basketball court to the funkier music. It will melt your heart and expand your horizons beyond all you thought was possible.

This heartfelt documentary gives the audience a chance to see what can happen when you don't allow age to stand in the way of a dream. It also shows just how hard it is to be a working dancer. It recognizes the barriers of being older. Berinstitute gives you access to those feelings of wanting to be as attractive and energetic as younger dancers, while allowing the audience to see how they overcome those feelings. The film doesn't politicize the issues of ageism in our country, but it does show deep respect and inclusion for a community that can often be left feeling irrelevant.

Next time you are asked what your grandma is doing, or what you think you'll be doing when you're a grandparent, maybe you will have a more expansive vision than you did before reading this essay and watching Dori Berinstitute's *Gotta Dance*.

A Jersey Boy native, Dante Puleio danced with the Limón Dance Company for many years before entering the UCI M.F.A. program, scheduled to graduate in June 2017. His thesis focuses on contemporary critical response to mid-20th century modern dance. It also included staging the Limón masterwork, There is a Time, which was presented alongside his own piece, to contextualize mid-century modern dance and demonstrate its profound impact on work being choreographed today. He hopes to pursue a career in dance education. dantepuleio.com.

Dante Puleio is scheduled to receive his MFA at University of California, Irvine, in June 2016. A native of TK, he danced with the Jose Limon company for TK years and now...