

absurd. To a visitor from Mars, it's a bizarre and silly art we pursue. We stand on one leg rather than two, we float our arms overhead rather than keep them at our sides, we spin on our toes trying to convince people that these movements are beautiful.

Then there is the refinement of these skills, like *physical intelligence*, by which I mean an awareness of how your body moves in space. There are also good *reflexes*, which are genetic gifts in the form of fast-twitch muscle fibers that can also be enhanced. As a choreographer I particularly value a dancer's ability to *function well in a group*. I look for dancers who can work independently and yet also pull together as a team. *Partnering* is a subset of this but maybe even more valuable for a dancer's career; if you can't partner, you'll rarely find work. So is the *willingness to take direction*, a skill noticed mostly when absent.

Dancers are also *masters of illusion*. In this category the paradigm is Fred Astaire. Ginger Rogers supposedly once asked him why he worked so hard; he replied, "To make it look easy." He worked on *everything*. For example, Astaire had very large hands of which he was extremely self-conscious. He would work for hours in front of mirrors to see exactly what his hands were doing and how they looked. He constructed the illusion of a man who was completely at ease with his body and his movements, as if he were acting totally on impulse, and yet nothing was unscripted, unrehearsed, or out of his control.

*Political skill* also stands out. The dance world is ruthless. What it takes to survive in a ballet company is very different from what it takes to survive as a gypsy dancer on Broadway. You need shrewd people instincts to handle both worlds and to know their differences.

The final skill I simply list as *forever the child*. You could call it "the ability to not know" or "denial" or "naïveté." It's basically a sense of innocence. You do not know that failure can hurt, or even that you can fail. This brand of unknowingness lets you take incredible risks onstage without appearing to consider the consequences.

These are the broad sweeping strokes of a dancer's skill set. How would you assemble your own? What do you have, what do you need, and what can you do to develop the skills you don't have?