**Jessica Tatum**

**DANCING, COMMITMENT, AND THE MUSIC THAT KEEPS IT ALL TOGETHER**  
  
WHAT  
  
 Ever since I was a little girl, I wanted to be a ballerina. I began formal dance training when I was four, although my dad will swear that my obsession stems from his games with me when I was a baby. More than likely, I am simply predisposed to lose my heart to ballet - for as soon as I began dance classes, I was hooked. When I am onstage, a peculiar sensation of weightlessness takes over, as though the music buoys me up into my leaps and turns. And to speak of the music is to speak of infinite complexities of expression. A piece of music on it's own can transport me to a the time when I first heard it, but to combine movement with that music is to communicate the emotions you feel and have felt with an audience. perhaps because of my love for  these two arts, the most fulfilling experience I have ever been a part of is the creation of a beautiful show.   
  
SO WHAT  
  
 So, I have grown up with the joy of dance in my life. But it has not been an easy road. I can clearly remember, for example, being crushed when I did not get the role of Clara in my dance studio’s production of “The Nutcracker,” or the opportunity to dance as a Columbine Doll in the next year’s production, or the experience of a demi-soloist role the year after that. These superior roles were always awarded to someone else who was evaluated as more accomplished, more talented, and better prepared. It is partly from these disappointments, however, that I learned what commitment meant, and still means, to me: it is knowing success before recognition. It is having enough faith to continue to work unabated when the world says “You’ll never make it.”  
 I like to think that connecting my dancing with the emotional potency of music was an equally important reason for this realization, but I am suspicious that it was only a catalyst for awakening a dormant passion to produce what I believe is beautiful – something that must have been there since I took my first dance class all those years ago. Music opened my eyes to the powerful effect of art on those who are witnesses to it and nurtured the seeds that allowed my love of the artistic community to grow.   
  
NOW WHAT  
  
 More recently, I have also discovered why I remain committed to dance: for the opportunity to make something worth remembering and sharing. Whether by mentoring younger ballet students or bringing dance to people in my community, I now strive to bring music and dance into the world around me. I want to show people how important the arts really are, both for the purpose of stimulating intellectual curiosity and as a vessel for dreams and goals. Art not only holds these dreams, but defines and inspires them. So as I look to the future, I hope to learn more about myself through my dancing and communicate it as best as I can to the people around me. I hope to choreograph, teach, and promote the performing and visual arts. And I hope to dance passionately and expressively for as long as I am able.  
 This, then, is my hope: to hear the music around me and move in a way that does it justice. No matter what level of "success" I can achieve in the dance world, I know that I will never stop dancing through all life’s adventures. I will be content with a soul filled with everyday music, and no matter the amount of acknowledgement I receive I will remain committed to what I love.