



A Natural Progression – Tristan Message

By Andrea Viney

For 28 year old Australian Ballet Artist Tristan Message, life is full to the brim with activity. When we speak at 6pm on a Tuesday night, he has just finished in the garden, using up the last of the Melbourne sun. It is only a small window of opportunity in between a day of dance or study at the Australian Ballet School and a usual evening spent with his fiancé.

The busy, active lifestyle that Tristan currently pursues, sounds remarkably similar to his childhood; 'leaping around the splintered floor of a church hall at age four doing ballet' and dabbling in a bit of everything, from football to piano. At the early age of twelve during his dancing role in the 'Nutcracker', Tristan knew dance would become his career, and there hasn't been a quiet moment since. From the Victorian College of the Arts Secondary School, he went straight on to train at the Australian Ballet School. For the past eight years, Tristan has enjoyed a fulfilling career as a soloist at the Australian Ballet, performing in principal roles such as *Spartacus*, *The Sentimental Bloke*, *Scheherazade* and *Raymonda*.

When I browse over Tristan's remarkable biography and the fifty or so well-known ballets he has performed in over his career, I am amazed that he has the time or energy for anything else. He admits that the weekends have lately been taken up with renovations and in between plastering and digging holes, he often forgets to give himself a break.

Tristan, a 2008 SCOPE participant, says that with the hectic nature of his life at the moment, he is grateful for the strong support the program offers. Being able to talk to his advisor and work through priorities and the emotional challenges of his career is a huge help. 'A week ago, I was in dire straits with so much going on ... it was great to have the support mechanisms in place to deal with it'.

Like many artists in performance based careers, Tristan was aware of his mortality as an artist and so enrolled in the SCOPE program to begin his career transition. His interest in the applications of Sports Science into ballet was also a driving force, and something the program will give him the time and space to pursue. Ultimately Tristan is sure a degree in Sports Science lies in his future.

Currently studying at the Australian Ballet School in vocational ballet training, Tristan is laying the foundations for a sustainable career in teaching. He describes the transition from performing life to teaching as a 'natural progression' and says SCOPE is to thank for helping him to focus the drive of his life. 'It is a great way to formalise those ideas, create a concrete plan and structure, and feel supported in those decisions,' he says.

With ballet playing such a significant role in his life, Tristan knows he will be involved in the industry on some level for the rest of his life. The support networks through SCOPE, including the advisors and his peers, will help Tristan judge his career and know when it is time to make the transition. While keeping a 'healthy scepticism' about how much longer he will be performing, Tristan's focus is now on teaching others the craft that has inspired his life. 'Sometimes I think I might become a better teacher than I am a dancer,' he says, 'I am really comfortable when I am in the studio [teaching] ... I feel I can contribute to something really important ... like I am making a difference'.