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Title: Oliver Endahl: The Original dance photographer of IG



Caption: Self Portrait of Oliver Endahl

One of the first dance photographers of Instagram and graduate of the San Francisco Ballet School Oliver Endahl speaks on the evolution of his field and the importance of exposing many to the art form of dance photography.

Currently living in Los Angeles, Calif. Endahl first started taking dance lessons in Rhode Island with his brother at the age of seven. Four years later, the prestigious San Francisco Ballet School accepted Endahl as a student, where he danced for about ten years and ultimately graduated at the highest level for boys.

At 19, Endahl borrowed his brother's DSLR Camera in the studio, where he began to take pictures of him and his friends dancing. After uploading his pictures to Facebook, Endahl rapidly gained popularity with hundreds of new followers every month.

"The visual internet we came to call it did not exist yet. The internet was still like nowhere near where it is today," Endahl said. "We put these photos on Facebook, and it was just me and my friends in the studio doing jumps and hitting nice Adagio lines."

Endahl explained his frustration at the lack of well taken ballet photos on the internet before he began uploading his pictures.

“It kind of annoyed me that you couldn't just Google like ballet photography and have things come up,” Endahl explained. “I see this issue where, there's so many photographers that don't know or don't bother to research the proper lines of dance.”

When Instagram became available in 2010, Endahl's sister encouraged him to post his dance photography on the app.

“As soon as I got on Instagram, I just really exploded,” Endahl said.

According to Endahl, utilizing Instagram more and more to make high quality ballet content available to all became the driving force behind his work.

“I was very motivated by the fact that this was now such an accessible way for the public to be exposed to good ballet. Because generally, it was such a pricey thing that was only for the wealthy,” Endahl said. “And now obviously, they could at least see photographs of high quality dancers for \$0.”

Endahl said he continued to challenge the limits of dance photography, taking dancers outside to have photoshoots in hiking trails and nature.

“We would just go hang out, like on a hiking trail in San Francisco and take ballet photos outside, which also really was not being done... back then no one was doing outdoor dance photography. It just did not exist,” Endahl said.

While gaining more than 10,000 new Instagram followers a month, Endahl decided to officially turn his hobby into a business in August 2011 – a year and a half after picking up his first camera.

However, Endahl said he faced the challenge of persuading others that content creation could be a powerful tool.

“A large obstacle was just trying to convince companies and individuals that it was even worth it to put effort in and create content on the internet... telling them like, this is going to be your resume, this is going to get you jobs if you utilize this new platform,” Endahl said.

As social media continues to develop and evolve, Endahl said he is continuing to challenge photography boundaries, shifting his main focus from pictures to videos.

Nicole Voris, a dancer and Endahl's wife who has been with Endahl since the very start of his photography journey added that his ability to persistently progress in social media and photography world shapes who he is.

“His work when he first started, like 10 years ago, it's super whimsical... then he started to get more into architecture.... And then, he started to get more into technology. So he started using

photo studios in Los Angeles and playing with, like different lighting,” Voris said. “And now he's starting to use more computer technology and projections, and videos.”

“His work is continually progressing and changing. And like he's never stagnant, there's always something new happening,” Voris added.

Now, Endahl photographs up to 110 dancers every year working with companies such as Vogue, Pointe Magazine, Marie Claire, and more.

Jenna Skipworth, a ballet dancer of more than 16 years and another early pioneer of posting dance photos onto social media said Endahl's work has inspired dancers and continues to improve the dance world.

“As a dancer, there's a lot of really negative things in the dance world that we've had to encounter and deal with. And Oliver has such good opinions and thoughts,” Skipworth said. “And not only does he have thoughts and opinions, but he actually pursues creating a better dance world through his art and through the way he talks to dancers and encourages them.”

In the future, Endahl said he hopes to dive deeper into storytelling through videography and photography.

“Within the next few years, my hope is to really put out ballet narratives... I would be interested in seeing how we can combine proper, real dynamic narratives with ballet dance and movement,” Endahl says. “So I hope to create that or at least try to and get it in front of as many people as possible.”