

[Book Journeys Author Interview](#) - Mar. 30, 2017

**Jenn McRobbie with Cheryl Ale, author of *The Spark: The Legacy that Changed the Dance World*.**

*"I lay in bed and I'm smiling at night, thanking my muses for giving me this purpose, because it's very enlightening in so many ways." ~Cheryl Ale*

Jenn:

Well, hello, everyone! March 30th, welcome to another episode of Book Journeys Radio. Every week, on Book Journeys Radio, we speak to accomplished authors who've gone from just having an idea for a book to actually having a finished book and out making a difference in the world. Our goal for this show is for you to walk away inspired and motivated, and today's author is so inspiring and motivating that I cannot wait to introduce you to her. Her name is Cheryl Ale and she's the founding director of RPM, which stands for Revolutionary Principles of Movement. Cheryl's book is titled *The Spark: The Legacy that Changed the Dance World*. Welcome to the show, Cheryl!

Cheryl:

Oh, thank you, Jenn, for having me, this is very exciting.

Jenn:

Oh, I'm so glad to have you on the show. Cheryl and I got to meet in person, oh, gosh, what was it, ... two months ago, right Cheryl?

Cheryl:

Yes, seems like forever, now, yup. ....

Jenn:

It does. But Cheryl is - I don't know how all that time went by!

Cheryl:

....

Jenn:

Well, Cheryl is just as engaging and beautiful in person as her photo that you're probably looking at now, if you're watching us live, so you are in for a treat.

Cheryl:

....

Jenn:

Now, Cheryl, I usually - now, Cheryl, I usually begin by - by asking our authors, can you tell the listeners a little bit about your book and who it's for?

Cheryl:

Well, my book is for dancers and teachers, once dance - professional dancers or dancers and teachers, and it is to embody the physics and the energetic motivations for classical ballet. Essentially. That's what it is! ... This training has been around for sixty years, so I have evolved with it a bit, so, ... I just got back from a tour - my tour de force of driving here from Maryland to South Florida and visiting studios along the way.

Jenn:

....

Cheryl:

So, that was quite eye-opening, yeah, it's exciting a bit, but breaking, but ... it was ... that's ... eight hundred miles later. ... it was fun, and it was a journey and more of an adventure and awakening all of these students and teachers along the way, it was thrilling, really. Really, that's - that's why I've written my book, was for the teachers and dancers whom - really have benefitted from - from understanding the principles and how to engage in them. ....

Jenn:

So, are the principles not usually taught, are - are they something that - that a dancer ... learns in the lifetime of being a dancer, or - or are only some teachers ... teaching these principles?

Cheryl:

Yeah, this started sixty years ago, ... and I thought, "Wow, sixty years ago, everyone's gonna know this," before I wrote my book.

Jenn:

Right!

Cheryl:

... really, and ... it was - the point of writing it was, I - I had this whole vision, with my project of, "Oh, well, it's well known, with David Howard and ... and Joanna Nealand and Ruth Petrinovic," which was ... this weeping idea, 'cause, historically, that I thought the whole dance world knew about this, which wasn't true, and as far as your questions - the principles, I was not seeing those anywhere, in fact, it felt as though ... classical ballet that dance had regressed in that regard, that it was more physical than ever, and no one was using the physics and the energetic intelligence, the kinesthetic intelligence, that this work embodies.

Jenn:

Wow.

Cheryl:

Yes. Yes. I - I've - and there's just so many injuries across America, young children breaking their backs, snapping their tendons, and all - all of that indicates that the teachers aren't really understanding how to apply the principles of movement.

Jenn:

I see, so, there's actually a - you're seeing a physical problem in students who aren't aware of those - these principles of movement.

Cheryl:

Exactly. The - the physical part that most teachers are dealing with, which I discovered very deeply after starting to write my book and interviewing teachers, to clearly understand what they were dealing with, with different body types, different levels of students, and then being very frustrated and not understanding why they couldn't get them to move their very different bodies, not everyone in - in America is chosen for their talent, in America, everyone gets - yeah, everyone gets to dance, right? It's America.

Jenn:

Right!

Cheryl:

So - so, you've got all these different body types, and the parents bring their - their children, 'cause they want them to be graceful or coordinated and they want them to be on *I Think You Can Dance* or *You Think I Can Dance* or *One Day, Maybe, I'll Dance*, that should be the ... the show.

Jenn:

Yes, *Maybe, One Day, I'll Dance*, I like that.

Cheryl:

... that's more ... realistic. But the truth of it is, they see all that, and that's what they wanna do right away, and these teachers don't know how to teach all these different body types. And it's so important for them to understand how to supersede their limitations in a safe way, kinesthetically, anatomically. Teachers aren't getting all of that in the style that they're teaching, so - so this is also what's integrated in - interlaced in - in all the bodies of work of the classical ballet world. So, this is what this is, ... it's complicated, let me just say that much.

Jenn:

It is complicated, but it sounds so necessary, and I love that it really is a message of inclusion, ... everyone can and should be able to dance as long as they are taught to do so using the body that we were given when we were born.

Cheryl:

Exactly, ... one of the most amazing things that I came in contact with is, I went to the - the Arts Conservatory of Dance in Tallahassee with Amy Lowe, and her students were just lovely, ... of mixed levels and different body types, and it was interesting because, as I worked with them, and you step into their circumference of energy, and what - what I - what I actually reach in and do is almost waking up your qi, right? And these - these children, when you reach in, and they're standing there, just so neutral, and when you do this, and they know and feel exactly what they need to feel, it's as if all the lights go on, it was so exciting to ... of their qi. And every student giggled when I would do this, I have the video ... posted. I post ... on my ... RPM page and my Cheryl Ale page, because extraordinarily delightful to see this happen. Really, what it is, just as you said, every one - every child has - every body has the ability to move and to dance.

Jenn:

Right!

Cheryl:

And ... it's like the Internet connection that we all are together. I - I like to say, we all own domain, ... and we all have this .... We don't have to go to GoDaddy ... to go get it. ... this is ours, yeah, we have our own incredible website, right here. And we have all the powers that be, it's just that you ... have to have a teacher that understands how to awaken all of those, and there's - there's about seven principles that - that you put into play here. And, no, they're not in classical ballet. They're not - it's not taught like this, ... divided out into being physics and energy and energy patterns, because ... it's a little woo-woo. It's a little woo-woo for the classical, they're ... "Well, what do you mean, patterns of energy?" ... with a woman in the sixties who actually caught, frame by frame by frame, of the greatest dancers in the world and how they were dancing. And when she would see their motivation, she would say, "Wait a minute, they're not teaching the motivation, they're teaching the step." And when you do that, that deadens the motivation. So, the motivation, meaning ... a backward circle before you jump, or before you hit a tennis ball, or the backward circle when you're riding a horse or swinging a golf club. It's that ... patterns that you - I know you ....

Jenn:

Yes! It - it's fascinating, ab - but I'd never - I'd never put it together, I don't think it's ... a precursor to movement, right? It's just something that I do when I move.

Cheryl:

Right! Like when you get up out of a chair, Jenn, if I said, "Get up out of a chair," you would - maybe, because I told you to stand up ... laboriously, but if I clap my hands and I said, "Jenn! Get up out of the chair," do you know what you would do before you got up? You would actually release all of the air in your body to stand - to stand up.

Jenn:

Oh!

Cheryl:

But you see, people - yeah, it's a given. So, the breath - the breath of the body is the piece of the motivation that comes before the movement.

Jenn:

Oh, wow. So, what a powerful thing to master, particularly as a dancer.

Cheryl:

Oh, it is! And it takes you across a lifetime, ... I learned this when I was six years old and ... old age of twenty-eight, I'm gonna lie, ....

Jenn:

You don't look a day over twenty-seven, Cheryl.

Cheryl:

... stay on this radio show forever, .... But ... off anyways. ....

Jenn:

Exactly, they'll cut us off, we don't get that show - that choice, but we'll try. Yes. So, well, Cheryl, you could have basically traveled the world teaching this to people. So, why did you decide to write a book on it?

Cheryl:

Well, ... I touched on this in the beginning of our conversation, is because, ..., I realized that this had - had gathered dust over the years, and it was ... forgotten, or the amalgamation of all the styles of dance up to this point - people thought, "Oh, well, this is evolution and we don't need these principles," or they were just totally forgotten, and I felt ... this was a legacy that needed to be - be - to be brought forward again. And the only way I could do that was to take this body of work and - and tell the story and tell the life experience of it, which ... I have to say that the guidance ... with Author Incubator and Angela really helped me to self-reflect on the reason I would share the - these triumphs and the failures with ... humanity again, ... I feel ... everything that I'd experienced in this lifetime, in the center of it was the training that I had had when I was six years old to professional dancer, and I felt ... if I could put this in a meaningful book, then I can speak to the pain and suffering that I know so many dancers, now teachers, have experienced and they would more readily accept what this is, where it came from, and how it can improve the li - their - their lives as teachers and - and produce wonderful dancers. So ... and so, you know what? It happened that way. ....

Jenn:

Right ... it's almost ... how could you not have written a book, right?

Cheryl:

Right! ... but ... I brought her together because the “A-ha!” the dance world right now is thrilling for me, that they’re all ... “Oh, yeah, that’s right!” And they all are .... So, I had a nice audience, there was - ... my teacher said, “Wow, this is based on my teacher’s training,” ... eighty-six years old, and, “Oh, here is my contact list” and all that. Well, she might as well have handed me a - ... blank sheet, because most of these people either had moved on or forgotten about it and moved on to another style.

Jenn:

Right.

Cheryl:

But - yes, so - so, that’s the reason I’ve written it, and I’m thrilled to give the testimony of ... Author Incubator, I wouldn’t have gotten it out in the world like this and be at the forefront right now of the dance world, people are waiting for their hard copies from the publisher, yes!

Jenn:

I’m ex - ... it gives me goosebumps, it’s crazy, isn’t it, Cheryl?

Cheryl:

It is crazy, but ... Jenn, when you do things in life and you do them for all the right reasons.

Jenn:

Yes.

Cheryl:

Somehow, it makes its way through, ... way through all the other - all the other negative struggles that happen in your life, if you’re there for the - ... if it’s purposeful, it somehow makes its way through any cloudy day, ... stays in the flow. Yeah.

Jenn:

Well, speaking of being in the flow, since you are so passionate about this topic, and you love it so much, did you find it easy to write the book, or did you experience writer’s block?

Cheryl:

Well, ... there were days, especially in the beginning, where I was ... “Oh, Angela talked about - well, ... there’s usually twenty thousand words in a book of ... - a basic book, just twenty thousand.”

Jenn:

Right.

Cheryl:

The ... of twenty thousand words on a page was ... and ... "Okay, I'm at three hundred words," and then, there were other days where I ... - where - where I thought, "Okay, I've written two pages." And then, all of a sudden, you realize that it's you that's stopping you in this life. And the thou - yes. It is you, that's kinda freaky, yet all of a sudden, you're ... "Why do you keep stopping yourself," then I had this amazing editor who said to me - Maggie McReynolds, who says, "You know, Cheryl, you've gotten into three chapters and all you need to do now is just ... the artist Jackson Pollock. It's like the dots on a page, just start throwing down the words and it will make a story. It will create art. It will all be there." So, she's ... opened the cage for me. And so, ... I just started - and I - I - I wrote six chapter - six chapters in ... three days.

Jenn:

Wow!

Cheryl:

And - and - not that any of it makes sense, but ... but it did, it - it actually got moved around and, yes, the idea, and this is where this goes and that goes, and the expertise there freed me up. ... you doing it on my own, it would have been ... it - it wouldn't have ever gotten done, it would have been in a journal in my nightstand, ... next to my bed or something like that.

Jenn:

Right! It wouldn't be out in the world making a difference, right?

Cheryl:

No! It wouldn't be out in the world making a difference and speaking directly to the - my teachers and dancers who are suffering with so many ills, and that was another piece of it that I realized I didn't really ever interview people before I started my company, thinking, "Oh, it's just one to leaping their this and they need that." Well, not true. And so, each school and each teacher has their - their problems, and speaking to those problems and bringing together community and the dance world ... was - was extremely - is extremely important for us now.

Jenn:

It is.

Cheryl:

Because dance being divided, yes. It - community, anywhere right now, ....

Jenn:

Right.

Cheryl:

We won't go there, we won't go - we won't even say the "T" word, but we will.

Jenn:

Exactly, but you're right, ... in any way you look at it right now, what - societally, we're all ... lacking, and it sounds like this - this is true in the dance world and everywhere else is community and bonding with each other.

Cheryl:

Exactly.

Jenn:

And I love this message of inclusion and remembering what we once knew, right? I'm assuming that ... given that breath is the focus of - of dance and movement that we all ... knew that at one point, right? And then we somehow forgot it?

Cheryl:

Well, I think what has happened is, A, in the beginning, then I said this before, in the 1800's, ... it was a thought with a French king in court doing a little step-hop, step-half- ... step, step, step, and - in the French court, ... again, and then it just became these ... ethereal ... around the stage, and ... the ballets were - were created with the orchestra, with - with the composers. So, they was failing, and it was all very intentional in that regard. Now, as dance has evolved, ... there's different schools of thought that - ... the French school and the - the Royal Academy of Dance school and the Vaganova, the Russian school, Cecchetti, the Italian school. Now, you have all these schools of thought and styles of ballet, and you would think that people would be moving a lot better. I - I'm happy to say the Russians are doing really well with this -

Jenn:

Wonderful.

Cheryl:

- because the Vaganova is all about that continuous flow and movement, and breath of the body is directly from Vaganova, ... the thing that doesn't work here, with the Russians, here - it's great in Russia, but here, Russ - ... Russia - picks the perfect body to depict the type of technique that they do, so ... legs that go up past their head, they've got all this crazy - I call it Cirque du Ballet ... almost grotesque, it's so beautiful. But ... every child that walks into an American studio, ... we don't test them to say, "Oh, well, can your leg go over your head? And can you do a split, and can you -" We don't do that here, yet the Russians are coming in and they're doing that to our American dancers and twisting their knees and twisting their ankles and twisting their ... and the Cubans are doing the same thing, I'm not dividing in that regard, I don't mean racially.

Jenn:

No, no, of course not.

Cheryl:

I mean, they ... used to having certain body types to work with, and the American body -

Jenn:

Fascinating.

Cheryl:

Yeah. The American body is ... - you're American, y - okay, so, you're - you're smaller, you're taller, you're shorter, you're heavier, you're stiffer, you're - ... but we work with that, and the teachers here have to understand how to adjust to these bodies. So - so all these years, yes, it has existed in the talented dancer, these principles. Where we - I know how to teach these principles to a child that has nothing and you can give them everything. Will they be a professional dancer? Time will only tell. We have seen dancers more from having nothing to being the most fabulous dancer you could ever imagine. And what does that come from? That comes from their intelligence, their multi-dimensional intelligence when, once you give them a chance, there's ... a morphing that goes on, and there's another freaky word! "Morphing." But we've seen it!

Jenn:

I - I - I can only imagine - I can only imagine that - the difference that it's making.

Cheryl:

Yup. Yeah, it - it is making a difference, and it has over all of these years. I started out with - with a very bad disability and a bowed leg and - and with all of that, these principles brought everything together and I knew no - nothing different and pursued an incredible career in classical ballet and musical theater, ... on to acting, on to stand up comedy w - comedy with ....

Jenn:

Exactly. And now, here we are on the radio!

Cheryl:

And I ... ready to get cut off in a minute, so - ....

Jenn:

Well, we got a few more minutes, luckily, so that's good. So, what is the best thing that's come out of having written and published your book?

Cheryl:

.... I think the best thing is the support of loving community that - of my friends and my family and the best of all is the dance ... is being acknowledged.

Jenn:

Yes.

Cheryl:

The teachers and the contributions to humanity as dancers, as teachers, being known for their lifetimes of dedication, because that's a big deal, what - this is based on what my teacher did, but - but the - the myriad of teachers and - and multitudes of teachers that do this every day and bring pure joy of the art of ballet, ... the hearts and minds of our children. There's no better contribution than that. That - the true purpose of what I've done, that fills me, I lay in bed and I'm smiling at night, and ... thanking my muses for giving me this purpose, because it's very enlightening in so many ways.

Jenn:

... I am covered in goosebumps and I'm grinning ear to ear because I just love - I love how filled with purpose you are, Cheryl, and how - I think you are a wonderful example of how you can serve other people and serve the world, and become so full of that service yourself that you almost don't need anything else, right?

Cheryl:

Yeah, i - ... I rush around every day, and even this morning I thought about just that ... being of service, because when I started my company, I wasn't in this - this mindset of service.

Jenn:

Right.

Cheryl:

But now, ... I wake up every day and I'm ... watch myself rushing around and I'm thinking, "What are you rushing to?" ... I'm rushing to get to the work every day, I was so excited to be asked to be on this show and I was incredibly waking up at three in the morning, thinking about it, just excited to communicate. I said, ... - and I'm ... "Are you just nervous? No! It's called purpose, Cheryl! It's called 'your purpose in life,' it's a beautiful thing."

Jenn:

... there might be a fine line between purpose and crazy to some people, but I see your purpose, I feel your purpose, girl.

Cheryl:

... sounded crazy, Jenn!

Jenn:

... not to me, but - but I ... you were just saying, ... waking up at three in the morning, and ... a lot of people would consider that not a benefit, but I love how you lean into it, and - and you understand that ... your message is - is important and bigger than you and that getting it out in the world is the goal.

Cheryl:

Yeah, ... I - I really didn't ... - the whole "publishing the book," and ... what I expected and this is - this process has been exhilarating. A - and ... the other piece of it ... determination and stamina that this has created for me, because I thought this was long gone for me, the process ... really demands this, it's a tremendous amount of stamina. But then, once you're there, you're disciplined and decisive, which was really, really blew my mind and the fact that I never saw it - I was capable, intellectually, which I would like to say, any - to anyone out there that's considering writing a book and "Wow, am I smart enough," or ... - or emotional, or "How do I put all of this into this," but ... the Author Incubator and Angela Lauria and yourself, with the kind of support you gave us, it - it was - it was just a no-brainer, which - which is a beautiful thing, "no-brainer" just has a new meaning now.

Jenn:

Yeah, exactly. There's no negative connotation to that, that phrase "no-brainer," right?

Cheryl:

... brainer, right! ....

Jenn:

Well, it was aw - our - I can honestly say, and I know I can answer on behalf of everyone at the company, that it's our pleasure to help you bring this message into the dance world and - and to the world at large, and - and it's true, we feel that way about all of our authors, because, when you truly touch that purpose, there's nothing more beautiful, than - than watching that unfold.

Cheryl:

Yes. Yeah, ... the whole surprise is amazing to me. ....

Jenn:

Well, Cheryl, I'm sad to say we're at our ti - at the end of our time and we only got in half of our comedy act for everyone here.

Cheryl:

... we did it, oh, my gosh!

Jenn:

I can't thank you enough for being on the show and - and everyone listening, just so you know, Cheryl popped on last minute to fill a spot that opened up, so she not only is amazing but she basically saved the day for us, so I can't tell you thank you enough.

Cheryl:

.... Oh, it's my pleasure, really, ... I ... for another ..., yeah, thank you. ....

Jenn:

Well, thank you. Well, find Cheryl on Facebook at “Ballet for Everybody,” or [balletforeverybody.com](http://balletforeverybody.com) or [rpmdance.com](http://rpmdance.com). Thank you so much and join us next week for another episode of Blog Talk ... - Book Journeys Radio.



