



Photo by: Joanna Paciorek

Dance Mogul: What inspired you to start dancing?

Maja K: Nothing particular that I've seen or heard of. I was just a very curious and active kid, and my parents and grandparents (who were taking care of me while parents were working) noticed that and tried different classes with me. So at the age of 6 I was already going to school, singing in the children choir, dancing ballet and learned english.

Dance Mogul: What was is like trying to develop your craft being from overseas?

Maja K: Why I even came to the US from Croatia in the first place was to train, to learn, and to soak up as much knowledge and experience as I can, just to be better dancer. I never even knew that there is an option for me to work as a dancer in the US. I believe my mentality of always wanting to learn more, and being a humble student brought me to where I am today. Being from a small country such as Croatia, where we didn't have much, where we learned dance from each other, sewn our own costumes and saved money to go and take just one class in a neighbor country, then you naturally appreciate everything that is given to you.

Maja Keres

Dance Mogul Magazine Exclusive Interview >>>

Dance Mogul: What was the experience like to transition to NY then to LA?

Maja K: Transitioning to New York from Croatia, as a working dancer, was a big difference. For the first time in my life I experienced productions of such level, paid rehearsals and auditioning with so many people. Also, for the first time I had an agent (shoutout to my amazing agents from Clear Talent Group on both coasts). It was so interesting to dive in that world where everything was new to me, but at the same time a bit stressful because booking jobs as a dancer was now the only source to pay my bills, and I was new in the game. At home I was living in my parents' house, I didn't have to pay my rent, I was teaching, I was comfortable. The same feeling happened when moving from NY to LA. I started feeling comfortable in NY. There wasn't as many auditions, but I was working. Mostly I was doing commercials.

And it felt good to be "booked and blessed" :D. But what I was hungry for was stage performances, music videos, big events, with top recording artists. And for that I needed to get out of my comfort zone and start again from the beginning - in LA. It felt like that, starting from scratch. Thankfully, I had a handful of friends here that moved from NY to LA previously, but I still was an unknown face to almost everybody. So, taking different classes, being in every audition, and working on jobs, got me more connected in the community. I never forced any

friendships or connections, all of them happened naturally and that's why I am surrounded with only amazing friends and people. LA is definitely more commercial and the community is way bigger than in NY. I also love that there are far more auditions and castings, which makes it more interesting business wise, but NY will always have my heart.

Dance Mogul: What hardships did you encounter pursuing your passion?

Maja K: I had to learn to accept what is. This industry is tough, there's no question. Tough in the way that it plays with your mind, with your self-confidence, with your self-perception. You hear so many NOs and you start doubting yourself - why they didn't choose me, was it the hair, was it my body, was it my wardrobe, or am I not a good enough dancer? Before I became a part of that world, I thought that no way that would shake me, I thought I was stronger than that, and that those kind of things were just in dance movies - exaggerated. But your mind can play serious games with you, and my challenge was to stop doubting myself and doubting the plan of the universe, which is not always easy, but I've learned to be at peace with whatever outcome. The only thing that's in my power is to do the best I can. The rest is up to whoever else. I have been on hold for some of my dream jobs, and got released, so many times, that I said I will change my name to Maja "On Hold" Keres .



Screenshot from Fergie's music video "M.I.L.F. \$"



Backstage in Carnegie Hall, NY, performing at the Empire season 2 ceremony with Jussie Smollett

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Dance Mogul: What would you tell your younger self based on your experiences now?

Maja K: I would say, don't doubt yourself or your abilities. Don't get scared of the size of your dream. You can do whatever you put your mind to. You'll see :)

Dance Mogul: What have been some of your favorite moments your career choices have brought you?

Maja K: Definitely one of the favorite moments was when I booked my first big job, just 2 months after moving to the States. Second was performing at the Empire Season 2 premiere ceremony in Carnegie Hall. Both the audition and booking was so last minute, that I didn't even have time to realize that I am dancing next to Beyonce's dancers. Only after it happened, it crossed my mind that I was on stage dancing next to those girls who I appreciate and respect so much. Me, Maja Keres from the small country Croatia. Performing at Coachella and working with AlunaGeorge is still one of my favorite and memorable moments. I'll also never forget the moment when my agent called me to say that I booked Fergie's music video. I know exactly where and who I was with, and how the day smelled. And the latest favorite moment is with no doubt dancing at the Grammy's with A Tribe Called Quest, Anderson Paak and Busta Rhymes. This career has brought me so many beautiful moments, traveling the world and making new friends and experiences.

Dance Mogul: What was it like to perform on the 2017 Grammy's ?

Maja K: It was magnificent in every way. The music was my absolute favorite, the choreography that Fatima Robinson and Dubz were in charge for was amazing, working with them again was another happy moment for me, the team of us 10 dancers was such an excellent group of people, and the energy in every rehearsal as well as the performance was so good. Not to mention that the message of the ATCQ performance was so strong. I really felt as an important part of that message, and it gave me the extra boost. And in the end, just performing in front of celebrities in Staples Center was something that was only a dream a year ago. So, definitely a job to remember.

Dance Mogul: What's next for you in 2017?

Maja K: For now, I only have a few plans, but as it is in this industry, today you're here, tomorrow you're there, so you never know what is coming. First and most important plan is getting my second artist visa so I can continue to pursue my dreams in the States. Secondly, I am finishing the shoot for a short film next month and then possibly going back to Croatia in June or July for a choreography job I am very excited for and to teach my students in Dance Center K2K which I am the co-owner of. Other than that, I'll try venturing a bit more in the modeling world this year.

Dance Mogul: Do you have any advice for the next generation of dancers?

Maja K: My advice would be, seek for the teachers that can help you grow, not help you get followers. Everything that you do, do it with an honest purpose. Don't follow the crowd - follow your heart and your gut, and the most important - be humble. Always be humble, and down to earth, because before being dancers, we are humans. So don't forget to be human.

Dance Mogul: Is there anyone you would like to thank for helping you on your journey?

Maja K: My family who always supported me in my crazy dreams, very much unconventional for where I'm from. My friends from Croatia who stand by me even from far away, and all the people who support me back home - I never imagined I could be a role model to dancers like I had my idols, and the fact that I am inspiring young girls or boys from Croatia to follow their dreams and believe they can achieve whatever they want, makes me the richest person in the world. Also, thank you to all the teachers in my life, and all the choreographers who gave me their trust and hired me, for the experiences I am receiving and soaking in. The biggest thank you goes to my boyfriend, partner in life Mislav. He is my biggest fan and my most honest critic at the same time.