Faculty in the Spotlight presents the inside scoop on the life of guest artist, Rodger Belman. During his time at the University of Michigan, Rodger taught the Tuesday/Thursday Freshman and Sophomore combined modern technique, Sophomore composition and Yoga-based stretching. His first appearance within the Department was during Winter 2011 when he set a piece on the Freshman Touring Company. Rodger contributed greatly to the Department of Dance during his short stay and we eagerly await for his return!

How and when did you start dancing?
I was a French major at George Mason University and I was nearing the end of my degree. I was out biking and stopped at the theater on campus to get water and I heard music coming from the theater. I opened the door, looked in, and they had people dancing on stage. So I’m peeking around the wall and the woman who was directing saw me and she said, “You can come in and watch if you want,” and I was like “Ohh...what is this?” and the guy on stage says “It’s modern dance, you know, like Fame!” So I watched rehearsal for awhile. The woman who was choreographing told me I should take some classes...so I did. I took those classes and I loved it and kept taking classes.

Did you always look at dance as a career path?
I never dreamt of being a dancer, even while I was dancing. I never thought, “Ahhh I’m going to go to New York and become a dancer!” I always thought that was for a different breed. [EDITOR’S NOTE: Rodger began seeing dance as a career choice once he started getting jobs and work in Washington D.C.]

Who inspires you?
Right off the bat, Laura Dean and Twyla Tharp because I had experience working with them. Colleen Thomas from Bill Young/Colleen Thomas & Co. Jodi Melnick is another beautiful performer. I would love to just get inside her head. Emanuel Gat. There are a lot of companies out there that are doing some really interesting things and it’s so cool that there are so many ways of approaching this art form. Just that in and of itself is what’s really intriguing.
How long were you with the Laura Dean dance company?
Six years until the company disbanded in 1995.

You were recently in China as a part of the American Dance Festival. Could you talk a little bit more about the event and how you were a part of it?
The ADF (American Dance Festival) formed an “ADF Henan,” which is a province in China, at Henan Normal University in Xinxiang. They asked me to go and I taught a technique class and did a gardens project there. We didn’t really know what space they had (for the gardens project) but we ended up finding an interesting space to perform outdoors.

Do you have any advice for our current dance students? Any recommendations for what they should do over the summer?
I would say go to these festivals and be seen. Study and keep studying. Keep dancing. Follow your heart, really, not your head, your heart. Your head might have to organize some things like how to survive and make money or whatever, but follow your heart.

If there were to be a Rodger sandwich, what would be in it?
Hmm, it would probably have avocado. I like good tuna, but I don’t eat a lot of it. When I think sandwich I think meat, but I’m not a big meat eater. A good portabello something... would be good. Put some cheese on it, grill it. Maybe a sandwich with a sliced fillet on it. (Rodger was a little indecisive on his sandwich.)

Do you have a favorite food?
I love pasta. I also like making soups and stews.

What do you enjoy doing when you are not dancing?
Does Yoga count? I’ve been a gym rat in the past so I like to do some sort of exercise, right now I’m doing a lot of Bikram Yoga. I love being outdoors-hiking and biking. I like cooking, I like making things. I’ve always talked about having a restaurant some day.

How do you like your eggs?
I think poached. But I like them scrambled...I’m not big on fried. I love poached eggs with some salmon. I like a good runny yoke.