

A SUPPLEMENT TO MAGAZINE DANCE & DanceTeacher

SECRETS OF A SUCCESSFUL STUDIO

The Right Image:

Shopping For
Mirrors

Your Next **Floor**

Barre Talk:

A Primer on Portables

A **Helping Hand**

for Disabled Dancers



MAGAZINE
DANCE
DanceTeacher

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Thinking **BIGGER**

Dance Dynamics laid the groundwork for expanding long before moving.

When Nina Koch purchased Dance Dynamics in Brentwood, CA, five years ago, there were 80 students enrolled. Now there are nearly 400. Last September the studio opened its doors at a new 4,500 sq.-ft. facility, more than double the size of the old one.

Before expanding, Koch laid the groundwork carefully. Seeing a lack of professional opportunities for her dancers, Koch developed the Brentwood Children's Ballet Theater. The company not only gives students the experience of formal auditions and full-scale performances, but is open to dancers from the entire community, even those that attend other stu-



dios. It's a way for them to get a taste of what Dance Dynamics has to offer.

Koch has learned a few lessons about growth:

IT'S A BUSINESS. When other studio owners say "I'm not in it for the money," Koch is taken aback. A teacher before purchasing the studio, Koch says, "If you want to teach dance classes don't open up a dance studio.

Running the business side takes away from the time that you get to be creative and work with the kids."

TEACHERS ARE YOUR BIGGEST ASSET. Finding qualified instructors has been the greatest challenge. Koch took out newspaper ads and searched craigslist.org. But in the end, she notes, "My best instructors found me."

THE NAME COUNTS. This fall, Dance Dynamics will be renamed East County Performing Arts Center to reflect the school's professional focus. Its rapid growth has led to plans for a second location by next year.
—Cheryl Watts

Fun Finds

Great fundraising items for students of all ages.

Skip selling cookies and chuck the catalogs. The secret to successful fundraising is items with real dancer appeal. Here are some great ideas:

IN THE BAG Pink for the prima ballerina in the making, this nylon tote has a hook and latch closure to keep dance gear safe and sound. Have enough to sell for all your tots and save when ordering six or more. \$7, style #E126, Dancing Dollies Tote. www.illinoistheatrical.com



STYLE CENTRAL
Tweens can show off their grande jetés and first place technique in this trendy album. Memories of their first convention and the friends they've met along the way will always be in reach. \$3.50, style #015-DSD1304-8, Dancer Photo Album. www.danceronly.com

BEAR IT Dancers of all ages will love these stuffed bears. Dressed for ballet or hip hop, they can be personalized with students' names, as well as your studio's name and the date of the performance. \$24.95. www.dancebears.com
—C.W.

Click 'n' Save

New software upgrades make running a studio easier than ever.

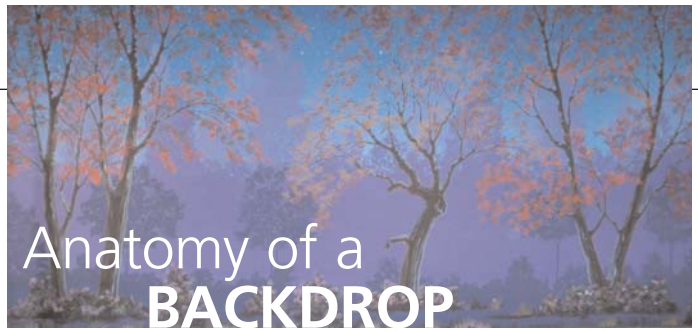
With updates to studio management software coming out every few months, why are you still doing half the work by hand?

It's time to stop worrying about tracking down payments. To cut down on this problem, COMPUDANCE (www.compu-dance.com) introduced Electronic Fund Transfer to its software last year. End the hassle of depositing checks by having funds transferred directly from a family's bank account to the studio's. This month, a new update will be released that automatically calculates tuition by the hour or the number of classes using a sliding scale.

If you want to bring together management, communication, and marketing, take a look at the latest package from Wellworks Business Systems, WELLWORKS CENTRE (www.wellworks.com). Program highlights include easy newsletter production and an e-commerce site that allows studios to earn a commission on wellness products that they sell to students.

Recently MINDBODY ONLINE (www.mindbodysoftware.com) has added a tagging feature that generates a list of students who have taken specific classes and targets them by e-blast about related upcoming events. A new marketing tool lets you store demographics about students so you can send information based on age, personal goals, and level of expertise.

You even can have a software program tailored for your studio's needs. DANCEWORKS by Akada Software (www.akadasoftware.com) is available in two versions, depending on the number of students. And the Student Staff Check In option lets you trash handwritten sheets and record attendance data electronically. It can be configured to let students record their own attendance with student ID cards printed from the program. —C.W.



Not sure how to create the right mood for a modern number? Can't afford an elaborate set for your *Nutcracker*? Add color and atmosphere with backdrops.

The wealth of designs available can be daunting—and inspiring. Some of Grosh Scenic Rentals' most popular are montages that incorporate several elements of a theme (www.grosh.com). Take your

dancers on a flying trip to glammy Las Vegas with a backdrop of signs, resorts, and casino elements that work for routines in several genres. Or go back in time with dates and images from past decades.

Artists at Charles H. Stewart keep in mind that designs must not overwhelm the performers (www.charleshstewart.com). The company says one of its most popular new looks blends international landmarks. Students can travel the world via a backdrop featuring the Leaning Tower of Pisa, Eiffel Tower, Taj Mahal, and Big Ben.

Dream World Backdrops (www.dreamworldbackdrops.com) has seen an upsurge in demand for backdrops that echo successful movies, including the latest James Bond, *Casino Royale*, and *Dreamgirls*. Backdrops with African themes are also gaining in popularity, thanks to the press during Oprah's trip to South Africa.

Behind the scenes at Backdrops Fantastic (www.backdropsfantastic.com), concept sketches are created and then artists decide on the best viewpoint from the audience, thus setting a backdrop's horizon line. The artists prefer deep, rich colors that work well with stage lighting and specialize in three dimensional backdrops that can help create a believable setting.

Whatever you dream up for your next dance performance, there is a backdrop out there to complement it. Planning your production ahead allows you to coordinate your themes and select a backdrop that will enhance all of them. Most companies will even work with you to develop a backdrop that is specific to your theme, if you want a customized one. —C.W.



Backdrops rent for \$150–\$700 a week. Set the scene for a production, or with a montage (below) for an entire recital.



Smart Moves

BY LAUREN KAY

Dance classes may be surging in popularity, thanks to reality TV shows like *So You Think You Can Dance*, but with parents looking for bargains and a competitive business climate, studio owners need more ideas than ever to keep an edge. Here are some tips from studios around the country.



CAMEO/CARRABBA DANCE INC.

Bothell, WA

Cameodance.com

Founded by Louise Fellows, director, and Marco Carrabba, ballet master, in 1993

Studios: 2 **teachers:** 8 **students:** 150

Styles: Ballet, lyrical, jazz, hip hop, tap

Focus: Ballet

Secret of success: "Consistency creates longevity. Parents are slow to trust your reputation, but that image is invaluable once established."

Costume advice: Build a collection. Buy costumes throughout the year, especially when companies have sales. Then, only charge parents a low "showcase fee" and keep the costumes after the recital.

Best purchase: Internet service and a web page. When parents search for information about dance schools now, they most often gather ideas surfing the web. An attractive website shows parents the artistic tone of the studio along with scheduling and location, all conveniently on their computer screen.

DALLAS POWERHOUSE OF DANCE

Dallas, Texas

Dallaspowerhouse.com

Founded by Shella Sattler, owner and director, 1995

Studios: 5 **teachers:** 25 **students:** 1,500

Styles: Ballet, jazz, lyrical, modern, hip hop, cheer, drill team, competition teams

Focus: There cannot be one weak discipline; specialize in everything by hiring the best teachers for each area.

Philosophy: Stay on the cutting edge. Use seminars and travel to interact with the national dance community. Stagnation is cheating the students who pay to learn the freshest techniques and styles.

Best purchase: Staff

Most popular class: Hip hop

New classes: Belly dancing, salsa, yoga, Pilates, West African

Unique feature: "We view our studio as a place of empowerment and self-esteem for the kids. With my background in psychology (Sattler has an M.A. in psychology), there is as much impromptu therapy as dance here. Really, they are equally important."



From top: Courtesy Cameo/Carrabba Dance Inc.; Courtesy Dallas Powerhouse of Dance

STUDIO PROFILES

DANCE CENTER EVANSTON

Evanston, IL

Dancecenterevanston.com

Founded by Béa Rashid, director, in 1994

Studios: 4 **teachers:** 23 **students:** 800

Styles: Modern, ballet, tap, jazz, hip hop, ballroom, "Just for Boys"

Focus: Ballet, modern

Philosophy: Students should learn through understanding the physiology and anatomy of dance, not just by mimicking what they see.

Unique feature: The Young Choreographers Project, in which students of Evanston Dance Ensemble submit ideas for choreography. Those that are chosen are paired with a professional dancer as mentor to help develop their pieces and learn how to shape movement.

Best purchase: Self-installed, high-quality dance floor

Top of wish list: A studio that doubles as a performance space with lights and sound system, and no mirrors.

New classes wish list: Composition and choreography, partnering



PALM BEACH BALLET CENTER INC.

Lake Park, FL

Founded by Homer Babb in 1958, taken over by Joan Miller in 1961

Studios: 4 **teachers:** 19 **students:** 251

Styles: Ballet, jazz, hip hop, modern, tap, flamenco

Focus: Ballet

Philosophy: "Each child has a talent of some kind, whether they are a performer, teacher material, or can write about dance history. If nothing else, instill an understanding of and appreciation for the art of dance."

Top of wish list: Equipment to video and review class afterwards as a teaching tool

Most popular class: Variations class where dancers are taught not only the choreography but also the history of the piece.

Unique feature: Monthly meetings with all students and Miller, so dancers can air grievances and nothing festers during class or rehearsals.

DANCE THEATRE NORTHWEST

University Place, WA

Dancetheaternorthwest.org

Founded by artistic director Melanie Kirk-Stauffer in 1987

Studios: 2 **teachers:** 7 **students:** 250

Styles: Ballet, jazz, lyrical, tap, musical theater, dance exercise

Focus: Classical ballet

Philosophy: Provide a wholesome atmosphere and a wellness-oriented school.

Best purchase: Studio-owned theatrical equipment to create a performance anywhere. Includes lights, sound, and microphones.

Top of wish list: More portable lighting

New classes wish list: More lyrical and introductory-level teen-adult ballet.

Secret of success: "People say I 'love it out' of my students. I am invested in each individual regardless of their goals, not just highly talented ones, but those that dance from the heart. These are truly the best performers anyway."





Jeté-ing over a Harlequin marley at Steps

Your Next Floor

Real-world advice from studio owners on how to choose.

BY LINDSAY COWAN

The right floor can last for years and take you from expansions through location changes. Before you make a decision, you need some essential information. Mary Katherine Vandiver, the director of marketing for Rose Brand floors, says you should know how the floor will be used, the frequency it will be used, the surface it will be installed on, and if the installation will be permanent or semi-permanent. Whether you put down marley or wood, it's what's under the surface that counts the most. The installation can affect how long your floor will last and how well it will adapt to change, though proper maintenance is key. Six studio owners share what they've learned about floors, installations, and how to create a successful dance environment from the ground up.

STEPS ON BROADWAY New York, NY

Number of studios: 10
Genres: Ballet, jazz, modern, tap, hip hop, musical theater
Floor: Cascade by Harlequin (all purpose roll-out vinyl floor)
 "I think it's a good multipurpose marley because it is a performance surface that is interdisciplinary, and at Steps we don't have one discipline per room. We may have a hip hop class one evening and then a pointe class in that room the next morning. That's why maintenance is so critical. I also find that this floor has texture, which helps prevent dancers from slipping. Once you create a consistent surface, dancers know which shoes to wear in order to avoid injury." —*Patricia Klausner, director of marketing*

RIPLEY-GRIER STUDIOS New York, NY

Number of studios: 41 rooms in 3 locations
Genres: Tap, ballet, jazz, hip hop, salsa
Floor: Timestep by Stagestep (multi-purpose solid PVC floor)
 "This seems like one of the most durable ones out there. I put foam blocks underneath and criss-cross plywood across the blocks and then put the floor on top of that. Make sure you put enough foam underneath. One of the most important things I've also found is using the right screws to nail the plywood down so that it doesn't pop up and rip the marley. Maintenance is key, too. I own my own buffer and I buff my floors once every six months, which makes a big difference." —*Butch Grier, co-owner*

ACADEMY OF PERFORMING ARTS, NEW ENGLAND Chelmsford, MA

Number of studios: 2

Genres: Ballet, jazz, modern, musical theater, yoga

Floor: Rosco

"We installed the floor ourselves and it was so simple. The rolls come in certain widths and then all we had to do was cut it, which was very easy. They recommend that you tape the floor down to the sub flooring, but in my experience I've found that this is not necessary because the floors don't move. And it allows me to rotate the panels every summer and clean the sub flooring. This is important because a pebble that gets caught under the flooring could possibly tear it."

—*Bryan Steele, co-owner*

RHYTHM STREET DANCE Herndon, VA

Number of studios: 4

Genres: Tap, jazz, ballet, lyrical

Floor: Mezzafloor by Entertainment Flooring

"The reason I chose this option is because it's a low profile sprung floor. It's only 1 3/4" thick, so if you want to put that floor in an existing room, you just install a slight ramp up to it. I didn't have to move outlets, mirrors, or doors for the extra layers. I laid it down myself and did a semi-permanent installation where you unroll the floor and overlap it and put double sided tape underneath which holds it down."

—*Glen Coleman, co-owner*

ROSALIE STUDIOS (home studio of Cindy Vindasius)

Number of studios: 1

Genre: Tap

Floor: Birch Sprung Floor by O'Mara



Ballet class at APA New England on a Rosco floor

"When I decided to convert my garage into a home tap studio, I spoke with O'Mara's about maple versus birch and they recommended birch, even though it was less expensive, because I was only using the floor for light tap dancing. When it arrived, I knew in advance that I would have to install it square by square, which I did myself. They handwrote specific instructions and had every piece labeled for me step by step. They also sent me all the tools and the floor plan. The floor and the whole process exceeded my expectations."

—*Cindy Vindasius, owner/tapper*

MOVE YOUR BODY California City, CA

Number of studios: 1

Genres: Pilates, yoga, dance aerobics, cardio-kickboxing

Floor: Floating Sub-Floor Kit by Alva's

"Being an engineer, I see the value and excellence of a floor as under the surface. Normally studios cover with vinyl for ballet, but we needed wood for fitness as well as dance. Alva's installed it for us, in about eight hours. They had the technique and knew what they

were doing. The floor is perfect for what I do. I haven't ever had a better floor."

—*Bruce Eustice, co-owner*

Lindsay Cowan writes on dance for DM's supplements.

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www.alvas.com

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www.harlequin.com

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www.danceequipment.com

ENTERTAINMENT FLOORING
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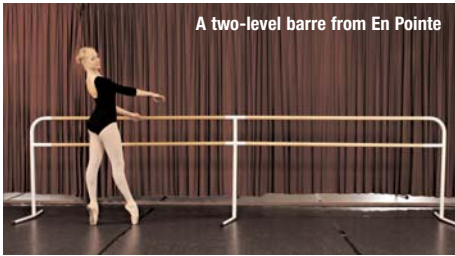
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A two-level barre from En Pointe



Gerstung's two-level model

Hold On

Tips for selecting a portable barre.

BY JENNIFER STAHL

To get in touch with her balance and prepare for center work, every ballet dancer begins class at the same place every day: the barre. Portable ones offer students an opportunity to wean themselves away from the seemingly limitless help of wall-mounted barres and watch their technique from a different angle—and they also offer teachers a solution to crowded classes.

“When my beginners began holding the portable barre with two hands and facing the mirror instead of the wall, not only did I stop losing their attention but they could see themselves in the mirror as I gave them corrections,” says April Joseph-Sykes, owner of Suncoast Academy of Dance in Palm Harbor, FL. “I was so surprised by how much improvement there was in just four months after I bought the barres.”

All portables are not alike. They come in different lengths, weights, materials, heights, and shapes. Some have two levels to hold, and some have one barre on each side of the platform. Gerstung's Fran Ice suggests deciding ahead what ages and how many people will be using it,

whether you plan to store it, and if you plan to bring it on tour.

If your studio has students of many ages—and heights—it's probably best to consider purchasing either a double barre (with two levels) or one that adjusts easily. While it's time-consuming to alter the barre height for each class, single barres come in handy for inspecting technique in the mirror because nothing gets in the way of students' legs or reflection. “You're free to pirouette, or face the barre and battement front,” says renowned ballet teacher Finis Jhung, whose Ballet Dynamics also offers single barres with pinholes that allow for height adjustments simple enough for young students to do themselves.

Portable barres come in lengths from 4' to 20' feet. Ones with a barre on each side of the platform let you squeeze more dancers on without their hands overlapping, but this variety eats up more space when you store them on the side and come to center.

Some portable barres are designed to be assembled and disassembled over and over. Figure out whether



An adjustable barre from Finis Jhung

your barres will mainly stay assembled, or if you're going to take them apart for tours or competitions. Either way, make sure the setup is not complicated. If you're going to be transporting the barres often, it's probably best to find a design that just clips together without hassle. Try assembling (or disassembling) a barre before purchasing it. Some come with carrying cases, convenient for touring and travel.

Constant pulling, pushing, and stretching on barres test their screws and brackets. Check to make sure the construction seems sturdy

enough to endure daily wear from your dancers. Metal piping is the tried and true classic. Although it makes for sturdier barres, they can begin to rust after several years. In humid, sweaty studios, dancers will eventually leave the barre with brown, smelly hands. Wood barres feel warmer to the touch, yet can end up splintering. Aluminum comes in very durable, yet light-weight, varieties and can be easy to maintain, says Jack Lucas, owner of En Pointe Enterprises, Ltd. "They're easy to sterilize very quickly just by wiping them down with a cloth, which is great when you have lots of students sharing the same

barres every day."

Portable barres' prices can vary by hundreds of dollars. "But if you want good equipment, just remember that you get what you pay for," says Joseph-Sykes. "You

should really only have to buy portable barres once, so go with something with quality."

Jennifer Stahl is Dance Magazine's education editor.

BARRE SHOPPING

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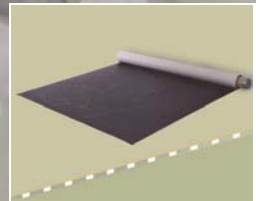
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A Stagestep mirror at Dance Elite, Destin, FL

The right one will reflect well on you and your students.

Mirror, Mirror

BY JENNIFER STAHL

A dancer may have a love-hate relationship with the mirror, but dance teachers know how helpful they can be. Teachers need students to keep an eye on their technique and see for themselves why they need to pull up, turnout, and hold their center, so choosing the right mirror can make a real difference. There's lots to keep in mind when you're shopping.

REFLECTIVITY: CLEAR ENOUGH?

Mirrors range in quality, though few realize that at a quick glance. Consider a mirror's reflectivity and crispness carefully. A distorted reflection is useless for dancers. See a mirror firsthand before you buy and install it. If you don't live close enough to a showroom, ask your dealer for a studio near you that has the one you're considering.

GLASSLESS: LIGHT AND BRIGHT

Glassless mirrors don't shatter or crack and don't require an insurance rider. They are lightweight—a 4' by 8' one only weighs about 12 lbs. Glassless mirrors don't fog and there's no distortion, because the mylar film they're made of has a higher percentile of reflection than glass, says Joe Reinke, owner of Dance Equipment International. "It's as though you're seeing another per-

son," says Leander Jones who got one for his home studio in Alexandria, LA. However, you can't cut a glassless mirror to make a hole for, say, a light switch.

INSURANCE: SAFE, NOT SORRY

If you plan to buy plate glass mirrors, you will need a rider. Injury due to glass mirrors is not typically covered in studio policies. "Although the incidence is not high, considering the number of mirrors a dance studio has, you should spend a little more and get a rider," says Randy Swartz, president of Stagestep, Inc., which sells mirrors, floors, and other equipment.

INSTALLATION: BACK IT UP

Depending on whether you rent or own your studio, there are various installation options. Most walls are not perfectly flat, but mirrors are. You may need to have the mirror sit in molding within a frame. Walls also can give off moisture. "Sometimes you don't see anything, but there's moisture and that leaves you with a foggy mirror when the back is cold and the front gets warm," says Swartz. Backing can eliminate this problem.

PLACEMENT: DON'T GET FLOORED

Where you mount a mirror makes a difference in its effectiveness. Don't

put it directly on the floor. "That's a great place for it to get whacked when someone throws down their dance bag," says Swartz. Remember, dancers don't stand directly against the mirror to see their feet. Once you know where your students will stand, you can figure out the angle of reflection you need and hang the mirror accordingly.

CURTAINS: COVER UP

Consider putting in a curtain tract in front of the mirror. Then you can take it out of play if you have a performance in the studio or if students get too distracted by their image.

Materials generally run \$6 to \$8 per square foot, but if you're using plate glass you need to hire people to install it. If you want to buy a cheaper mirror, be cautious about quality. It may not last as long as a professional model. "Now I can watch myself brilliantly from head to toe," says Jones, a competitive country dancer. "And when my belly's hanging out and over, that's exactly what I see."

Jennifer Stahl is Dance Magazine's education editor.

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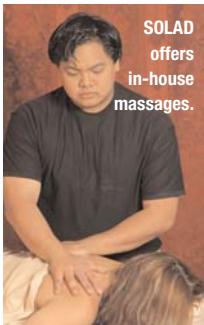


Look Sharp has a summer camp that stages a musical.

Not Your Average Studio

By offering unusual services, dance studios can move to the head of the class.

Ballet students practice pointe while company dancers get relief after a big performance from an in-house massage therapist. Both happen at SOLAD (Spirit of Light and Dance) Dance Center in Walnut Creek, CA, which offers opportunities and amenities beyond the average barre-and-ballet operation.



SOLAD offers in-house massages.

Expanding your studio's offerings can draw in students looking for something out of the ordinary, and improve your bottom line. Everything from costuming Mardi Gras balls to aiding the less fortunate

can be effective, as these studios have discovered.

HELPING OUT

After Miller Street Dance Academy student Troy Haywood told owner Michelle Rogers that his family had adopted a child from a Liberian orphanage, she wanted to help other less-fortunate children. So she

enlisted the students of her Charlotte, NC, studio to sell pink wristbands to raise money for the orphanage. Rogers says since many students are too busy at dance class to volunteer, bringing the opportunity to Miller Street has made it possible for them to get involved.

"When I got that going I just really saw things changing," Rogers says. "Children would be saving money for a bicycle and then they'd donate every dollar to the orphanage."

Rogers continues to organize more fundraisers for the studio—a charity cookbook, penny wars, and countless donation drives. She rewards students with membership in the "Service Society" once they earn 150 service points. Like the honor roll of their schools, students are recognized by receiving a plaque at the studio's banquet. The dancer who earns the most points receives a large stuffed frog (the studio's mascot).

The good deeds have garnered national recognition for the families involved when *O Magazine* ran a feature last December. Over the two years she has done these programs, Rogers says it has helped increase

her enrollment. Moreover, philanthropy has changed the attitude of her whole operation.

"Your children are nicer, and it attracts the kind of people you want to have in your studio," she says.

ACTING OUT

Look Sharp Performing Arts Center in Ramsey, NJ, draws in would-be performers by offering more than just fancy footwork. This summer, director Colleen Cross and artistic director Rosanne Renda are making tween dreams come true by letting their dance and theater students star in their own version of the Disney Channel blockbuster *High School Musical*. After the school's regular spring recital, Cross will hold auditions. The production will run as a camp, with a separate participation fee covering rehearsals and performance costs.

Cross says Look Sharp students who come for the theater productions often end up enrolling in the fall in a "movement for actors" class, and then a dance class. The studio pulls in older students as well—offering stretching and dance-

BY KIM MOREAU

STUDIO SECRETS

as-exercise classes as well as professional level classes for dance teachers in the area. With the myriad levels and subjects available, Cross often has an entire family involved, with mothers taking adult classes while their kids are in beginner ones.

RELIEVING TENSION

SOLAD offers more advanced students the chance to dance in one of its two student companies or its affiliated professional company. When the arduous schedule takes a toll on their bodies, the in-house massage therapist can help.

Though dancers receive a discount, Rhianna Ray, the studio's operations manager, says the massages are something reserved for the tensest of times. "It's hard for dancers to afford massage, because they don't make a heck of a lot of money," Ray says. "But it's definitely useful to have him around when we have shows and dancers are

stressing their bodies."

But the massages do more than just give the dancers some quick relaxation therapy. By showing that SOLAD invests in their well-being, it sends a message to students that the studio is about more than just the bottom line. Dancers like coming to a place where their bodies count as much as their technique.

DRESSING UP

When Jerisse Bolton-Grantham's mother expanded Jeffie Jean Studio in Baton Rouge, LA, to include a costume shop 20 years ago, the decision seemed logical. The studio not only outfitted her own dancers, but the dancers of neighboring studios as well and ran a costume rental business on the side.

"It goes along with the dancing,"

A Bolton-Grantham costume



Bolton-Grantham says. "If you have a concept of the number you want to stage, then you see the costume with it."

While Bolton-Grantham has scaled back her business a bit in

recent years, she still outfits her studio's numbers and those of friends. She says busy parents appreciate the attention to detail. "We're the only studio where the parents pick up their costumes and everything's done for them—and we go all out." Bolton-Grantham also provides costumes and choreography for Mardi Gras, outfitting the city's Krewe of Romany each carnival season. "It's just the thing to do in Louisiana," she says.

Kim Moreau is a research assistant for Macfadden Performing Arts Media and a New York writer.



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Amaya, in a harness that takes 75 percent of her body weight.



Volunteers demonstrate pliés. Below, ABT's Julie Kent with niece Mary and studio founder Tensia Fonseca.

Dancing From the Heart

For teachers at Maryland Youth Ballet, helping students with cerebral palsy experience the joy of moving was a personal mission.



When Jennifer Cox wanted to give her granddaughter, who suffers from cerebral palsy, the opportunity to dance, she took matters into her own hands. Cox, a teacher at Maryland Youth Ballet and mother of famed American Ballet Theatre principal Julie Kent, went to work with pediatric physical therapist Rebecca Leonard to design the studio's Music & Motion program. MYB, in Silver Spring, MD, has been training dancers in the Washington, D.C. area for more than 30 years, and many of the abled students volunteered to help with the program.

Music & Motion lets physically disabled students from ages 4 to 10 move while harnessed in a partial weight-bearing overhead track system. In it, they can dance using their own feet. Live piano music lets them feel the rhythm in their bodies.

"At MYB, we want everyone to

BY RACHEL LEIGH DOLAN

dance. This program gives these children who find walking and basic motor activity a struggle the ability to really soar," says MYB board chairman Charlie Barnett. The benefits are physical as well as mental. "The most recent research indicates that partial weight-bearing therapy is among the most promising in developing large motor skills," says Leonard.

Prior to the track system installation, the class, which was created in 2004, had MYB volunteers stabilizing the students while they balanced on physical therapy balls. The new system still uses the volunteers, but the disabled children now are able to move with less restraint. "The child gains a sense of freedom that she normally does not have," says Leonard.

The track system was made possible after a recent move to new space in Silver Spring's downtown Arts and Entertainment District. The five-studio facility currently accommodates 350



Playing warm up music.

students. Administrators and parents rallied with donations when the school had to relocate, raising \$200,000 for the new studio. A special grant from a local foundation of \$25,000 funded the track system.

Cox's 7-year-old granddaughter Mary attends the Music & Motion class every week, and the studio plans to add more classes this summer to reach out to a larger group of students. "Each week is challenging in a new way, but along with those challenges come new rewards," says Cox. "I am overwhelmed by the outpouring of support for this program."

Rachel Leigh Dolan is a DM intern.