

Activity of the Month

BY CRISTINA DIMEN

Whether Ballet, Modern, Tap or Jazz, Dance Classes Do More Than Teach Children How To Move: They Develop Important Life Skills

IT'S A BOY THING, TOO!

Many boys show an interest in dance from an early age, but too often they write off taking dance classes as a "girl thing." To dispel this perception, remind boys that superheroes move in dance-like steps, suggests Virginia Mecene of the Martha Graham School of Contemporary Dance. Yvette Campbell of the Ailey Extension adds that little sports fans may be interested to know that many pro football players take dance classes to improve their speed and agility. Hanne Larsen and Melanie Zrihen, co-founders of Downtown Dance Factory (DDF) in Tribeca, report that boys make up 11 percent of their students, in part because of musicals like "Billy Elliot" and hit shows like "So You Think You Can Dance." Once your boy is ready to give dance a try, start by enrolling him in an all-male class—the ones at DDF are taught by male instructors trained in dance, sports and martial arts. "Boys have no sense of reticence in attending classes since they're with their guy friends, and not an 'oddy' in a girls' class," Larsen says. —C.D.



92nd Street Y Harkness Dance Center

So You Think You'll Take Dance?

Little ones often showcase their first dance moves—swaying, bouncing and clapping their hands—before they take their first steps. As they grow, many kids show an interest in further exploring dance, whether classical ballet, modern dance, tap, jazz, hip hop or ballroom. Yet with so many worthwhile extracurricular activities available, why choose dance?

WHY DANCE?

Dancing positively impacts children's lives in multiple ways. In addition to gaining self-confidence and learning to express themselves through creative movement, kids develop proper posture along with strength and flexibility, cultivate a sense of musicality and more. In fact, says Virginia Mecene, director of the Martha Graham School of Contemporary Dance and artistic director of Graham II, dance classes even prepare children for school, as one of the first things small dancers learn is to "focus and pay attention to the teacher." "Dancers are organized individuals who can juggle their academic and dance classes," adds Kate Thomas, director of the School at Steps. Through dance, "kids develop patience as they wait for

their turn and improve their memory as the sequence of steps gets longer," says Hanne Larsen, artistic director of Downtown Dance Factory (DDF).

WHAT TO LOOK FOR

When considering dance classes, "Parents should look for a school with experienced teachers who have a warm and positive approach to teaching, a well-equipped facility and, if possible, live accompaniment," says Julia Dubno, director of Ballet Academy East (BAE). Consider the teaching method as well; Renata Celichowska, director of 92nd Street Y's Harkness Dance Center, recommends a lyrical and storytelling approach for teaching creative ballet. Most of all, says Jo Matos, director of children's programming at Joffrey Ballet School, look for a great teacher. "The teacher's background is more important than state-of-the-art facilities," Matos says. "The teacher should be in control of the class, while being caring and loving."

Most schools offer a range of programs for different age groups, from Mommy & Me classes for 2- and 3-year-olds to pre-ballet classes for 3- to 6-year-olds to more intensive classes for kids 7 and up.

DANCE STUDIOS



Miss Kristin's
Shooting Stars

74th Street Magic, 212-737-2989,
74MAGIC.com

92nd Street Y's School of the Arts,
212-415-5500, 92y.org

Albee School of Dance, 718-852-7025,
albeedance.com

The Ailey Extension, 212-405-9000,
alvinaiiley.org

American Youth Dance Theater,
212-717-5419,
americanyouthdancetheater.com

Applause New York City, 212-717-0703,
applauseny.com

Ballet Hispanico, 212-362-6710,
ballethispanico.org

Broadway Dance Center, 212-582-
9304, broadwaydancecenter.com

Brooklyn Arts Exchange, 718-832-0018,
bax.org

Church Street School for Music and Art,
212-571-7290, churchstreetschool.org

Creative Arts Studio, 718-797-5600,
creativeartsstudio.com

Creative Play For Kids, 212-729-1667,
creativeplayforkids.com

Dancing Divas and Dudes, 917-279-
4351, dancingdivasanddudes.com

Downtown Dance Factory, 917-587-
6386, downtowndancefactory.com

JCC of Manhattan, 646-505-5700,
jccmanhattan.org

Joffrey Ballet School, 212-254-8520,
joffreyballetschool.com

Lower East Side Dance Academy,
212-343-1620, lesdanceacademy.com

Lucy Moses School, 212-501-3360,
kaufman-center.org

Manhattan Movement and Arts Center,
212-787-1178, manhattanmovement.com

Manhattan Youth Ballet, 212-787-1178,
manhattanyouthballet.org

Mark Morris Dance Group,
718-624-8400, markmorrisdancegroup.org

**Martha Graham School of Contemporary
Dance**, 212-838-5886, marthagraham.org

**Miss Kristin's Shooting Stars Performing
Arts Company**, 212-987-2203,
kristinsstars.com

New York Theatre Ballet, 212-679-0401
nytb.org

Peridance Center, 212-505-0886,
peridance.com

School at Steps, 212-874-3678,
stepsnyc.com/school

Steps on Broadway, 212-874-2410,
stepsnyc.com

GETTING SERIOUS

As a child's casual interest in dancing transitions into a more serious pursuit, parents should expect an increase in commitment in terms of time. "By 11 or 12 years old, students committed to dancing take classes four to five days a week, plus rehearsals for performances," says Matos. Yvette Campbell, director of the Ailey Extension, notes, "Serious 13-year-old dancers take one to two classes a day. At this point, dancing could be their only activity outside of school."

SUPPORTING YOUR DANCER

Parents can nurture their child's interest in dance by watching their latest moves, attending student performances and taking them to live productions. Finally, "parents should dance—if kids see their parents dancing, it will encourage them," Celichowska says. So go ahead, boogie down with your kids, and revel in the joy of creative expression together. 🌀