

Beyond the Pirouettes – Why Send Your Kids to Dance Lessons?

Parents have long been sending their children to dance lessons. What do they learn beyond the arabesques and pirouettes?



Almost every parent knows that there is more to a child's education than going to school and studying for exams. There is a bewildering variety of extracurricular activities competing for the attention of today's parents. Some parents encourage their children in sports and outdoor activities to keep them fit and active, or simply to tire them out before they take them home. Music lessons are an option for the brave parents who are happy to sacrifice the tranquility of their home for the cacophony of an out-of-tune orchestra. Another traditional route is dance lessons. This often evokes an image of ballet lessons for girls in private schools. This may have been the case twenty years ago, but it is very far from the truth today. Today's dance classes have a broad appeal to kids of all cultural backgrounds. The phenomenally successful *Billy Elliot* movie is not just fiction, it was partly inspired by Matthew Bourne's highly acclaimed all-male production of *Swan Lake*. (The Scottish Ballet is bringing

more of his work to the 2014 Hong Kong Arts Festival, with the Asian premiere of his new work, *Highland Fling*.)

So what do the kids learn from dance lessons apart from the joy of dance itself? Like sports lessons, dance classes develop fitness and physical coordination. Like music lessons, dance classes also instil a sense of musicality. Different forms of dance (ballet, jazz, Chinese traditional dance) bring with them cultural history through drama. Dance is also a very social activity for the students. The younger ones play together while the teenagers learn to collaborate. In short, dance provides an all-round education in the arts as well as develop the social skills that are so often neglected under the pressure of exam-oriented schooling. Mrs Mandy Ho, whose daughter Cherry is a student at the RL School of Dance, attests to this, "We are grateful to see that Cherry has become a more confident and independent girl since learning ballet. We know we made the right decision years ago."

RL School of Dance

RL School of Dance is now recruiting students from all over Hong Kong.

The school has a permanent qualified teaching staff trained in classical ballet, modern dance and jazz, with experience in performance and choreography. The school has an excellent track record, with many students winning HK-wide competitions and dance scholarships. These include success in the Star Award organised by the HK Ballet Group (香港芭蕾舞團) and honorary award in Interschool Dance Festival for several years. Students at all levels regularly perform in public at charity and other events. Although the core training at the school is based on ballet, the students are exposed to other forms of dance, such as jazz, tap, yoga and hip hop.

The school also invites guest teachers to teach one-off courses every year, bringing fresh ideas and new inspiration to the students. For the last two years, the school managed to invite Jill Firth to run the



Beijing National Theatre (北京大劇院) in Aug 2013

courses for both students and teachers. Jill has worked in dance and theatre, taught specialist dance courses in Europe, America, Mexico, New Zealand and Asia. She introduced the Royal Academy of Dance (RAD) (英國皇家舞蹈學院) Pre-School curriculum in Italy, Israel and Singapore and teaches on international summer schools worldwide. Jill was the class teacher for the Fonteyn Nureyev competitions and the Genee Dance Challenge.

The school also organises unique educational trips for their students. In the summer of 2013, a group of students, both at junior and senior levels, visited the Beijing Dance Academy (BDA) (北京舞蹈學院), the only higher educational institution in Mainland China for dancing. They took part in the specially designed five-day programme of master classes in Chinese folk dance, ballet and jazz.



Jill Firth (Guest Teacher) – RAD Tutor

Sylvia Tsang who is our teacher, shared the experience of trip in Beijing: "The Trip to the dance camp/school allows us to appreciate the effort of each participant to exchange their culture through movement, working out the same steps but see each one interpret their movements and presentation in her/his special way and enjoyment."

In Aug 2011, students joined the summer course at Taipei National University of the Arts (TNUA) (國立臺北藝術大學). Accompanied by Professor Christopher Bannerman - Head of ResCen Research Centre, Middlesex University UK, they visited the studio of Cloud Gate Dance Theatre of Taiwan (雲門舞集) and was greeted by the Founder and Artistic Director Lim Hwai-Min (林懷文). Other trips included the RAD Summer Course in London.

Rosalind Lee discovered her passion for dance as a teenager. She decided

to pursue a career in dance and left for London to train at the Royal Academy of Dance. She was one of the earliest graduates of the RAD to return and teach in Hong Kong. She has been teaching exclusively at the Maryknoll Convent School for many years. She has also been active in the Hong Kong ballet community. She has served as the chair of the RAD Hong Kong Committee and continues to advise them on their programmes of dance education in Hong Kong.

Rosalind Lee says, "The aim of my school is to encourage the young generation to take part in dance and to develop in them a lasting appreciation of the value of the arts in our society."



From left Jane Kwok, Professor Christopher Bannerman - Head of ResCen, Middlesex University UK, Founder and Artistic Director of Cloud Gate Dance Theatre of Taiwan (雲門舞集) Lim Hwai-Min (林懷文), Rosalind Lee, Sylvia Tsang and Cloudgate dancer



Escape from the coop-48th Interschool Dance Festival in Feb 2012



Outside of BDA (北京舞蹈學院) in Aug 2013



Anson Tam, Cherry Ho, Jane Kwok – Semi-finalists of Star Award in August 2007

www.rlschoolofdance.com

16/F., TAL Building, 49 Austin Rd., Kowloon Tel: +852 2738 6633 E-mail: rleschoolofdance@gmail.com RL School of Dance