



Ballet and Book Smart



from the board president

In my personal life, I am the mother of four young dancers and delight to serve as president of our Champaign Urbana Ballet Board. Professionally, I hold a Doctorate in Education and teach courses at Illinois as a part of my role as Director of University Primary School at The College of Education. As an educator for nearly 20 years, I have experienced ballet dancers as successful students, especially in terms of disposition and awareness. The ability to work hard and focus, meet goals incrementally and with great effort, and be mindful of self and others begins at an early age in the dance studio.

In the studio, student-dancers become stellar at shifting from small to big picture, sequencing parts to make a whole, and trial and error. Skills like these are critical in the classroom, alongside creativity and an organized mind. Ballet dancers are accustomed to challenge and achievement, and research supports arts at the forefront of student's life linked to higher grade point averages, stronger test scores, and even the likelihood to take calculus.

Ballet requires extreme levels of body awareness, in response to music and most often in synchronization with other dancers. The fine manipulation a dancer has over her foot amazes me. Our youngest dancers concentrate deeply, adjusting their toes in a simple pointe to demi pointe exercise, while our older students carefully wrap toes that once grappled with this simple exercise. I have seen my daughter's brow furrow as she sends brain-signals to her tiny toes. Her brain is hard at work opening pathways that extend far beyond this physical movement. National Endowment for the Arts funded research indicates that dance, as a kinetic art form, activates multiple systems in students' brains—emotion, motivation, attention, and cognition—which heightens levels of engagement, problem solving, and creation of knowledge.

As you support our dancers through your generous donations and attendance at performances, feel proud with us! You are apart of our community of artists at Champaign Urbana Ballet, a community that celebrates the student-dancer as a multi-accomplished person in the classroom, studio, and stage.



A dancer's challenge is not merely to do things on stage that seem impossible. It is to make those impossible-looking things seem effortless. The turns, the leaps, and the lifts should look so natural, so easy, that one can move through all of them and complete a variation with a smile and, perhaps, a glow. The truth is that nothing that an audience sees on stage comes to a dancer without extreme effort: thousands of hours of study followed by hundreds of hours of rehearsal. The ninety minutes of dance that comprise a production are just the tip of an iceberg of learning and solidifying skills, memorizing and polishing choreography, and practicing looking relaxed. In short, ballet is not for those who want their successes to come easily. It is for those who love to work.

But dancers are not in this by themselves. Parents, grandparents, baby-sitters, and carpools drop them off, pick them up, and support them in myriad other ways. Dancers need shoes, tights, and leotards, not to mention baskets of supplies for their hair. Having a child who takes ballet seriously is no small commitment. Which leads to the question of why. Why do parents and families go to the lengths that they do to keep their children in ballet? Is it simply love of the art form or the thrill of an opening night?

Many parents have learned through involvement in ballet that its benefits extend well beyond the studio and the stage. There are, of course, not many professional situations in which a grand jeté is useful as such. College students generally can't use multiple pirouettes to pass a chemistry exam. But the path to learning these moves provides a meaningful education that can indeed benefit dancers in their educational and professional pursuits. There are the lessons that one learns in the ballet studio: focus, attention to detail, situational awareness, respect for fellow dancers, cooperation, and, most importantly, the cumulative benefits of hard work and commitment. Dancers learn that discipline and persistence are absolutely essential ingredients to success. No amount of exposure to sayings about perspiration trumping inspiration can stand in for the actual experience of perspiration in pursuit of an artistic director's inspiration.

There are also many lessons that come from the demands that dancing puts on a young person's schedule and energies. With at least two hours a day spent dancing and with additional time spent in transit, dancers must also become proficient in time management; they must learn to prioritize; they must be efficient and, as they do in the studio, avoid unnecessary distractions. And because a dancer's body is his artistic instrument, he must also learn to take care of it with proper nourishment and rest.

Ballet is, in many ways, a perfect classroom for life. Many of its lessons can be learned in other places and other ways, but few other pursuits offer these lessons while also cultivating a love of the performing arts, a taste for classical music, and the knowledge that the right amount of preparation and a confident smile can fix most of life's problems.

- Jon Ebel

Read the NEA research on the benefits of dance for students in math, science, languages, and other disciplines at <http://arts.gov/sites/default/files/Research-Art-Works-NDEO.pdf>

Pictured: Cover, Byla Chapman: Left, Board President Ali Lewis with daughter Daisy Grace: Center, Company Dancer Nick Hittle. Photos by Darrell Hoemann, Tobey Martinez, Dan Merlo, and alumni selfies.

alumni perspectives



Olivia Cangelaris

MD/PhD in the Medical Scholars Program at ILLINOIS Bioengineering

"I learned many lessons as a ballet dancer: I gained the discipline, confidence, and perseverance required to succeed in engineering and medicine while working in the studio to refine my technique, and dancing on the stage, translating my passion for a role so the audience felt it, as well. The creativity, patience, and eloquence I acquired teaching ballet classes and overseeing children's rehearsals shaped my ability to inspire in others an appreciation for my work by conveying the theory in an accessible way. I believe, to a certain extent, that I am an engineer because I am a dancer."



Bri Chapman

Junior in Engineering at ILLINOIS Math & Computer Science + Psychology Software Engineering Intern at Apple

"Ballet taught me to define art as structured creativity. Ballet challenges artists to evoke emotion in the viewer, or tell a story, while operating under strict rules. As an engineer, I have applied these strategies, using the creative process I developed in ballet to enhance my engineering skills. Because of ballet, I view restrictions as a tool to enhance my creativity and problem-solving ability, rather than a barrier that makes the problem unnecessarily difficult."



Rachel Kaplan

Internal Medicine resident at Northwestern Cardiology

"From learning the steps of *Swan Lake* (from a video) to picking up the steps of a procedure, the skills I learned from ballet continue to carry over to my life as a physician. Ballet helped me master key spatial awareness skills that have enabled me to learn and perform invasive medical procedures. Furthermore, balancing ballet with high school at Uni taught me invaluable time management skills that continue to benefit me as a resident working 80 hours a week."



Maeva O'Brien

Freshman at Harvard College English or History & Literature

"My background in dance gave me a focused mentality and work ethic that have proved essential to achieving academic success. Ballet taught me to be process-oriented; I take pleasure in working toward a goal and perfecting details rather than placing all the value of an experience in its end product. Training in a corps de ballet taught me to work collaboratively and understand my role as part of a bigger picture."

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www.cuballet.com/donate.php Thank you!

a few to look for

CU Ballet's *Swan Lake* has all of the classic features beloved by the masses, and even a few twists for the discerning audience member looking for something unexpected. Here's a peek behind the scenes of this year's production.

Ruffled Feathers

Swans are donning new tutus, custom made with a unique serging technique that ruffles the edge of the thin white tulle creating the skirt's layers. Artistic Director Deanna Doty designed the new costumes for this production, and costumers have been constructing them since January, using enough tulle to span 5.5 football fields.



Rising Tide

The lake, created by scenic designer Andy Warfel, rises in each scene, symbolizing how the story and its characters become consumed by the darkness and beauty of the water with each act; revelry turns to passion and finally to resurrection from tragedy. That's pretty deep, indeed.



Winged Villainy

Company dancer Kevin Burnside portrays the evil Von Rothbart as a fierce, Goth, winged knight. Doty outsourced construction of his massive wings to a production house. Burnside says the wicked role "allows me to be the Gemini twin that lives within me; he's arrogant, sinister, and completely out to punish all that walk in his path."



Swan Dive

When the choreographer tells you to "go jump in a lake," an obedient ballerina does just that. The climactic ending requires Odette to hurl herself from the height of a cliff into the murky water (and gymnastic pads) below. The landing isn't necessarily soft, though, and the dancer is coached on how to protect herself...and the costume!



Pi Day coincided with a long Saturday rehearsal, and company dancers made the most of it.



Champaign Urbana Ballet

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