

## HOW DOES ONE SELECT A BALLET SCHOOL AND/ OR DANCE STUDIO?

A Parent's and Adult Student's Guide to help when choosing the right school and best program for YOU.

"Mommy, Daddy, Look at me!!!—I'm DANCING!"

And as she or he twirls about you are delighted by the loveliness and joy, and possibly also gripped with fear by either in the lack of knowledge you have to help this little one properly experience the joy of dancing. Or, by the absence of expertise to guide your child if he or she so chooses, into years of dance training and performing or perhaps a professional career!

But YOU are the first step in this direction and unfortunately most parents and adult students have little information concerning how to even begin this important educational process. This Guide is written to help one ask the important questions and then to decide what is best for you and/or your child.

Every discerning parent and adult student desires a quality education for the soon-to-be dance student. Yet most parents or adult students do not know that ballet and dance instructors in our country are not licensed or even required to pass a dance examination in order to "teach". ANYONE can open a dance studio and call him or herself a teacher. With the increasing number of dance studios, how does a parent or adult student know which is the best? Which school or studio and has the best environment for his or her child or his or herself?

To know both the questions to ask and the answers, which are best for your needs, looking at several topics may be of assistance.

## THE FACILITIES:

Visiting the studio facilities is extremely important; there is no other way to know in what environment you or your child will be dancing. Questions to ask—

- Is the facility clean?
- Is there parking?
- Are there barres attached to the walls and are there large mirrors?
- Is there space in which to move and develop as a dancer?
- Is the class size proportional to the amount of space?
- How many students are in a class?
- What type of floor does the studio have? Tile or parka over concrete which can cause the dance injuries of shin splints, stress fractures, back pains and other problems — or a sprung or floating wooden floor covered with dance flooring?

Since space is our canvas, at RBI our large spacious studios with sprung Harlequin covered floors offer each student room to fully express his or her movement potential on a surface that absorbs the impact of dance and the space to become art in motion.

## THE PROFESSIONAL FACULTY: Questions to ask—

Has the instructor of the class either:

- Completed a university degree in dance or is currently a degree bound candidate?
- Danced professionally?
- Is certified by an accepted professional teachers pedagogical society such as Vaganava or Cecchetti?

Membership in a dance association is of lesser value; examinations as a requirement for membership are sometimes helpful but should not be the guiding point.

Knowing that ballet and dance instructors are not licensed, it is important that all of the Faculty of Rogers Ballet Inc. are highly-qualified adults either BFA bound at Friends University or are already professional educators

### **THE EDUCATIONAL APPROACH AND DESIRED OUTCOMES:**

Questions to ask—

Even if the parent or adult student knows little about ballet and dance, he or she can ask educational question such as:

- What educational approach does one desire or expect?
- What type of program does one want: recreational, competitive, artistic?
- Which is more important: learning or simply having fun in a social environment?
- Does one want a one-subject class or a combination class with many dance forms of ballet, tap, jazz, and/or other activities within one lesson? And why?
- Does one value structure, discipline and accountability, or does one simply want a playtime experience?
- Again, dose one want a school or studio where dance is a recreational tool, a complete sport or an art form?
- Are new students allowed to join the class at any time? Are they evaluated first so that their admission into the class does not hinder the progress of the class already underway?

At Rogers Ballet the discriminating parent and adult student finds an educational approach which is structured to the whole person and to the serious minded student whether the student is career bound or enjoying movement for the pleasure of the art or conditioning. In order to safeguard the quality of on-going classes, new student appointments and/or evaluations are required.

### **THE TYPE OF PROGRAMS AND CLASSES:** Questions to ask—

With so many choices available in the dance business, one will find a program that matches the desires of the parent or adult student. So, the next step is to decide what one wants.

Comparing dance to others activities one may have experienced personally might be helpful. For example, did one take music lessons, ice skating lessons, horseback riding lessons, acting lessons? Play team sports? Swimming lessons?

Within these experiences were a variety of genre or methods taught in each class?

- For instance, in a weekly swimming lesson did one learn how to demonstrate the breast stroke, execute a bit of diving, learn underwater photography, execute synchronized swimming routines and conquer flip turns?

Or did the student concentrate on learning the basic techniques of swimming and then gradually add more advanced and varied subjects?

- If one were to begin weekly riding lesson would he or she expect to learn a little of the Western, English, Dressage and Barrel Racing methods or would the student prefer to understand and become proficient in one area before attempting the others?

Ballet and Dance Classes offer the same opportunities of choice. Ballet schools usually offer one-subject classes with advancing levels and ages from movement classes to advanced ballet, pointe classes and company performance opportunities. Many dance studios primarily offer combination classes with a bit of ballet, tap, jazz, hip hop and other subjects within one class period.

At Rogers Ballet, ballet classes are expected for the child until she is ready and able to decide if pre-pointe and eventually pointe work is an anticipated goal and hope. By the time this choice is being made, the student has the opportunity to enjoy the one-subject classes of tap, jazz or other related dance forms as well. Then he or she can make informed decisions based upon seasoned and skilled experience. Dancers from RBI are dancing professionally in ballet companies, tap companies and in musical theatre. Having the sense of accomplishment that ballet creates, many others are applying successful these learned life skills into their other chosen careers.

### **THE PERFORMANCE OPPORTUNITIES:**

Ballet and much dance are performing arts which were created for an audience in a theatrical environment. But there should be a balance between concentrating on the vocabulary and technical aspects which make the art pleasing to observe and the time in class required to learn choreography and prepare for the stage.

Questions to ask—

- Is the entire term dedicated to learning a recital dance or does the student's class time focus upon dissemination of information, corrections and individual attention in order to accomplish the techniques of the art?
- Is the parent concerned with the type of music both instrumental and vocal utilized as well as the age appropriateness of the costumes?
- Are the parents and students expected to buy or sell advertisement for the programs, to buy or sell tickets to the performance, to buy "solo dances" for the opportunity to perform alone?

The best way to evaluate performances is to attend the concert or recitals that are many and varied usually from the end of April into the middle of June. Call the school or studio for the dates and times.

Questions to ask as you attend—

- Does each student know the dance? Do they seem confident?
- Are the dancers in unison and musically correct?
- Are the students dancing independently or relying on fellow classmates or a teacher in front for the dancers to mimic?
- Is the overall presentation professional and aesthetically pleasing?
- Are the pointe dancers obviously prepared for pointe work?
- Again, what about the music? The costumes? The hair? The shoes?

At Rogers Ballet dance is an art form worthy of practice and appreciation. The primary focus for the young dancer is the process

of learning the art, mastering the skills, and developing the whole person. We also believe that stage experience offers the student an opportunity through practice and accountability both to enjoy the performing experience and benefit from the self-confidence and assurance developed from the stage opportunity.

Performance opportunities in *The Nutcracker*, Community Events, In-school demonstrations, Workshops, or Fully-costumed Student Concerts are available.

### **THE METHOD OF BALLET:**

Any authentic ballet class worldwide follows a well-defined structure: barre, stretches and various sections of center work and reverence. The classes last from one to one and a half hours in length. There should be French terminology used, age appropriate ballet vocabulary of steps presented, mastery of technical skills relevant to the number of years of training and the student's physical capacity, corrections given, and hands-on individual attention within a disciplined, but positive environment. Questions to ask—

- Is there a curriculum, a syllabus, a clearly defined plan of information to be disseminated and outcomes to be achieved or is this merely a class of free time, non-directed activity?
- Does the school closely follow one of the well-established and proven methods of ballet, either the French, Russian or Italian? Or the syllabus of RAD or Balanchine?
- Are the Creative dance or movement classes developing motor skills, utilizing a structured system with fun and creativity, and presenting material of value or simply running about dressed in tutus?
- Is the Pre-ballet class actually a preparation for formal training and an opportunity to develop the student's attention span while nurturing creativity or is this a free time of activity that is merely an older creative movement class? And, who is teaching the youngest of the students, an older student or a qualified professional?
- At what age is classical ballet actually introduced?
- How old are the young ladies when they begin pointe work? What are the criteria for dancing on pointe?

- Are the boys receiving the type of ballet training necessary for their own special requirements of strength, masculinity and technical demands?
- Has the school produced professional dancers?
- Is there a full artistic experience of the dance art with the allied arts of music, painting, history, etc.?

Rogers Ballet Inc. is dedicated to the serious study of classical ballet in an atmosphere conducive to the joy of movement and learning. A graded-system and curriculum based upon the Cecchetti Method [Italian] and a professional faculty foster the steady development of each individual while promoting self-discipline, self-respect, and self-confidence. To insure maximum progress, all students are carefully placed according to age and ability. Classical ballet with its exacting technique does not begin until the student is eight years of age. Class size is limited and much emphasis is placed upon individual attention. Other Related Dance Forms are offered, but ballet is the basis of all performance dance.

According to A. Whitehill and W. Noble, authors of The Parents Book of Ballet, "The best way to choose a teacher and a school is to ask questions and to follow the steps outlined. Visit the school and watch a class. The teacher should be giving verbal and "hands on" corrections; it should be a disciplined class. Do not—repeat, do not! — choose a teacher because of location, price or convenience. Ease of car pooling, allowing a child to be with her best friend a couple of hours more each day, are *not* reasons to choose either a teacher or a school. Improper training can result in malformed bones, improper muscle structure and career frustrations. Ballet training is serious training, and it should be approached in a serious manner." [Page 22]

So, visiting the studio and observing a class if possible before a decision is made is extremely important. Most studios will welcome you to watch their older advanced classes since it does not distract those students when observed. Be sure to call ahead and make an appointment so that your visit will be fruitful and informative.

We at hope these guidelines will assist you, the discerning parent or student, as you search for the best school and/or studio for you and your family.

For additional information see [rogersballet.com](http://rogersballet.com)

Please call us as at Rogers Ballet Inc., 316-263-8014 if you have questions or if we can be of further assistance to you.

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