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# BALLET NEWS

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Lydia Bevan and RDT dancers perform *Fancy Nancy: Bonjour, Butterfly*, one of the pieces in the October 10 *Storybook Tales*.

## Raleigh Dance Theatre Celebrates 25<sup>th</sup> Season

Three performances by the Raleigh Dance Theatre in early October kick off a year-long 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration that culminates this spring when former RDT dancers now dancing professionally from Santa Fe to New York and Philadelphia to Belgium will return to perform on stage with current RDT dancers.

"It has been a rewarding and fruitful 25 years," says Mary LeGere, RDT's artistic director, who joined RDT founder Ann Vorus in 1991 after a solo career with the Pennsylvania Ballet. "The fall season will have plenty of family favorites. Between now and the *Spring Repertoire* performances we are contacting and encouraging RDT alumni to return home to help us celebrate RDT's quarter century."

A listing of the companies where RDT alumni have and are now performing offers a healthy cross section of the current dance scene: Carolina Ballet, Cincinnati Ballet, Pennsylvania Ballet, Stuttgart Ballet, Dutch National Ballet, New York City Ballet, Royal Ballet of Flanders, Charleston Ballet Theatre and Aspen/Santa Fe Ballet.

*25<sup>th</sup> continues on page 3*

## My Summer at the Atlanta Ballet

By Maddie Rossie

This summer I had the privilege of dancing with Atlanta Ballet's five-week summer intensive program. The program was in midtown Atlanta at the main studios, which made the whole experience even more wonderful.

The intensive started off amazingly by just being in a big city like Atlanta. I had never been in a big city before, so I really had no idea what it would be like. My eyes were glued to the window as we drove around looking for the dorms. Throughout the five weeks, I became accustomed to living in the big city. I really enjoyed being able to walk everywhere and just the overall atmosphere of the city. We even got to ride the subway!

We always traveled in large groups, walking around with at least three other people. But, it still felt like we were living on our own, like we were independent people and what teenager doesn't want to feel that freedom?

The first day of class was extremely intimidating, because there were over 90 dancers stuffed into one placement class. It was really hard to get myself noticed; it was definitely the worst day of the whole summer. After that, we were all split up into four groups based on technique.

All of the teachers at Atlanta Ballet were extremely different, which made it really fun. We had one teacher named Armando Luna. He was absolutely crazy, scary and funny. If you messed up, he would either literally bark at you, tell you that he trusted you and you let him down, or fire you from his imaginary company. His combinations were insane and nobody ever knew what they were, but he really taught you how to stop being so rigid and to be willing to try crazy jumps and turns and such. Most of all, you were not allowed to be shy in his class! This was especially beneficial to me, because I tend to stand in the back of the classroom. But, I learned that it is okay to stand in the front or to show the combination if you know it. If you know what you are doing, then show it!

My favorite teacher was Dale Shields. She is the ballet mistress of Atlanta Ballet. She usually only works with the company members, but she teaches students over the summer. I thought it was amazing working with somebody who works with professionals on a daily basis. She was really hard and strict, but she had a humorous side if she was happy with your dancing. She is almost the opposite of Armando because she likes everything neat and pretty, but she still loves to see personality, and not plain, boring dancers.

The studios themselves were beautiful. There were a total of six studios spread across three floors. They all had huge windows that overlooked the city, and most of them were rather large. Atlanta Ballet is currently

*Atlanta Ballet continues on page 2*



Maddie Rossie is shown right along with Lydia Bevan, left, performing Paquita, Spring Repertoire 2009.

## In the Wings

By Emily Krause

I'm in the wings. I can hear the crowd clapping. I'm so excited. My heart is pumping really fast, but before I go on stage I have to stretch. If I don't stretch, I could hurt myself.

There are lots of different types of dance: soft and graceful or energetic and exciting. Dance means so much to me. I dance at my house all the time. Sometimes I dance at school. Dance is my hobby. I started dancing when I was three.

When I didn't take dance, I stood outside of the studio my sister was in and did what they did. I am so inspired by dance. When I see the older girls dance it looks so beautiful. The costumes that they wear in dances are so pretty and graceful.

I also like ballet because I have lots of friends at the place I dance, The Raleigh School of Ballet. Getting on stage is fun. It's my favorite thing to do.

At The Raleigh School of Ballet I take contemporary and ballet. I like contemporary because you get to isolate your body and have a great time. Dance is exciting. When I get to dance it just feels so great to dance. ¶

*Editor's note: Emily Krause is a 4<sup>th</sup> grader. She wrote this in May 2009, when she was eight years old.*

building new studios at a different location, which are supposed to be bigger and better, and open next summer.

The dorms at The Savannah College of Art and Design weren't bad either. They were very unique and artsy. Pretty much everything was made of concrete but as long as you brought a rug, it was cozy. Each dorm had a kitchen with a stove, a full-size fridge and freezer and plenty of cabinet space. It was perfect for making simple pasta and other basic necessities. If I went again next year, I would definitely cook rather than use the meal plan. The kitchens have plenty of room to make yourself tasty food that you can choose, rather than waiting to see what you are going to be served on the meal plan.

My favorite part about the camp was watching the professional level dancers. This class consisted mainly of professional dancers and dancers trying to get a job with Atlanta Ballet. They were all absolutely amazing and I greatly looked forward to watching them every day! Their class was always during lunch, so I would eat my lunch as quickly as possible, then I would go sit in the doorway to watch.

My favorite dancer is a professional with Atlanta Ballet named Rachel Van Buskirk. She was one of our counselors and she was my favorite person to watch when she took class. Rachel is without a doubt my biggest role model. She acted as a mentor to me and would help me and listen to me anytime I needed her. With all the students she taught, she would go out of her way to make sure they understood her corrections before she moved on. She would even stay after class and help you. In the dorms she was really nice to everybody, but I felt a special connection with her. She knows a lot about me and could tell when I needed to talk, whether it was about my dancing or anything else. She always had a solution. It was my second summer with her as my counselor and I hope it won't be my last!

It all came to a close with a final performance. The professional level performed with us. It was really fun to watch them and guess who was going to be invited to stay. After our performance, we had to leave. I definitely did not want to go home. It was really hard to say goodbye to all the friends I had made. I know that some of the friendships I made will last me for many years to come. I am still in contact with as many of them as I can keep up with.

It was my second time attending an Atlanta Ballet intensive program, so I got to reunite with a best friend that I made the previous summer. It was amazing to see her. She is planning to come to North Carolina sometime this year! It is truly a bonding experience to spend every day for five weeks with people who share your passion. I hope to see them all again next summer. ¶

*Editor's note: Maddie Rossie is in 11<sup>th</sup> grade at Middle Creek High School.*

Raleigh Dance Theatre is hosting a part

Alice & Fancy Nancy

will be in attendance and cordially invite you to a  
Tea Party at GARS COFFEE HOUSE & TEA ROOM  
Sunday, November 8, 2009

Two seatings: 2:30 p.m. or 4:30 p.m.

A full tea including sandwiches and desserts  
will be served as you mingle with the storybook characters.

Tickets are \$24 per person for the tea,  
or \$30 per person for tea and a ticket to the  
October 10th "Storybook Tales" Performance  
For more information please call 919-834-1058

## Casting Conundrum

"Twenty-five years? I can't believe it," says Ms. Vorus, a former dancer with Atlanta Ballet who founded the company in 1984 with the aim of providing dancers with a solid classical foundation for dance careers. "It was fun starting the company and today it's sheer pleasure seeing what Mary (LeGere) and her associates do with these dancers year in and year out." Ms. Vorus has since retired to the mountains in Brevard, N.C.

What she will see this fall is three performances of *Storybook Tales* in Fletcher Opera Theater at Raleigh's Progress Energy Center for the Performing Arts on Saturday, Oct. 10 at 11 a.m., 3 p.m. and 7 p.m. The program features Ms. LeGere's popular *Fancy Nancy: Bonjour, Butterfly*. The piece, which premiered last fall, is based on the children's book by Jane O'Connor with illustrations by Robin Preiss Glasser. Ms. Glasser, a best-selling illustrator of children's books, will be featured in an upcoming *People* magazine article and has a strong connection to RDT. She and Ms. LeGere danced at the Pennsylvania Ballet during the 1970s and '80s. *Fancy Nancy* books, including pre-sales of the yet-to-be-released *Fancy Nancy: Splendiferous Christmas* with bookplates signed by the illustrator, are available through RDT.

Another favorite on the fall program is Jennifer Sommers' *Alice in Wonderland* based on the Lewis Carroll classic with music by Dmitri Shostakovich. Ms. Sommers is a former RDT associate artistic director and faculty member of The Raleigh School of Ballet. She now lives in Houston, Tex., where she teaches dance in a charter school. Also on the bill is *Boumouville Divertissements*, which is choreographed by Ms. LeGere and based on the style of classic legendary Danish choreographer August Boumouville.

Meanwhile, RDT personnel are contacting as many former dancers as possible from around the world to encourage them to be in Raleigh this spring. Look for more information about the spring celebration and make sure you are on the mailing list. We do not want you to miss out on the events surrounding the 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary *Spring Repertoire* performances. §

### Get Connected to the 25<sup>th</sup>

Raleigh Dance Theatre's expanding roster of alumni and the magic of the Internet have led to two new developments that will bring people with RDT ties closer together.

Last year former RDT dancers Helen Johnston and Leah Cauley started contacting RDT alums through Facebook. Now RDT has its own Facebook page and we would love to have you as a fan.

Whether or not you are currently on our mailing list or receive emails from RDT, you can now receive RDT updates as a fan on Facebook. Once you are on Facebook, just search "Raleigh Dance Theatre," (page, not group) and click "become a fan."

RDT alums and current RSB faculty members, Claire Bynum and RDT Associate Director Megan Marvel, are actively searching for more RDT alumni. Our goal is to compile a complete list of alums including physical and email addresses in preparation for our 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Gala *Spring Repertoire* performances on March 20. If you are an alum and want to be added to the list or know the current contact information of a former RDT dancer, please contact RDT at [raleighdance@att.net](mailto:raleighdance@att.net) or send us a personal message through Facebook. Contact information collected will NOT be posted publicly on Facebook. However, we would like to create a document that can be updated yearly and can be sent to RDT alums via email or personal Facebook message so that we can all stay in touch with each other. §

Seeing the long-awaited cast list is part of every dancer's life and always sends dancers' thoughts whirling from elation to excitement or from disappointment to anger. Happy thoughts might be: "Wow! I have learning a soloist part!" or "Yeah. I'm in the guest choreographer's rehearsal!" Disappointed dancers might doubt themselves and ask questions like: "Why am I in only one ballet, while my friend is in two or even three?" "Why was I cast with this group of dancers?" "Why wasn't I cast in this ballet?" "Why am I not dancing on pointe?" "Why am I the second cast?" "Why am I sharing a role?" "They don't like me." "They don't think I am a good dancer."

Such negative thoughts are common and often difficult to work through. A dancer's ultimate goal is performing onstage, where the public sees the payoff for the endless hours of rehearsal and the daily repetition necessary to learn ballet technique. For a dancer, the applause after a successful variation is a great satisfaction and reward and well worth the work.

The dancer's appearance on stage is the result of a process that is not entirely in his or her hands. First, the dance is cast by an artistic director and/or choreographer. Then the dancer must continually prove he/she is worthy of the role during rehearsals. The artistic director of a ballet company, whether professional or not, always has the same goal: casting dancers in a way that is appropriate to their ability, style and experience. At the same time, the artistic director must develop a varied program that is interesting and pleasing to a paying audience.

Casting dancers and creating a program demand an exorbitant amount of time and energy from the artistic staff. Factors in the decisions include: age, seniority, experience, size, technique, work ethic in the class room and rehearsal studio, attitude, compatibility with the role and review of recent performances on stage. The make-up of the company changes from year to year which affects artistic decisions as well. It is by no means an exact science.

Working with teenage dancers complicates the process because teenagers are dealing with a lot of growing-up issues and the pressures of school. Raleigh Dance Theatre Artistic Director, Mary LeGere says, "We try to give all the dancers what we feel is the appropriate opportunity, but it is probably impossible to please everyone. While we try to be sensitive to this, as a part of their performance training we also want to give them a fairly close 'real life professional ballet dancer experience.'"

Knowing this does not necessarily make it easier for a disappointed dancer. Learning how to deal with disappointment is a very difficult but important life skill, especially for a dancer. What can the dancer do to positively channel her disgruntled energies? Here are some things for dancers coping with the ups and downs of the dance life to think about: Check to see if all the casting for a particular season has been made public. Honestly evaluate your strengths, weaknesses and work ethic. Put yourself in the shoes of the artistic staff and really think through what went into their decisions. If you are still frustrated go and talk directly to the artistic staff. That's why the staff is here: to make you the very best dancer possible. You will get the best feedback by talking directly to your teachers.

"We want and encourage dancers to come to us directly with their

questions and concerns,” says Ms. LeGere. “We, on the artistic staff, were all dancers once and recall how much courage it takes for a dancer to express frustration. Negativity has a way of festering and permeating the atmosphere so we really try to encourage the dancers not to let that happen. Talking through concerns is generally very productive.”

“Your time will come” is an oft-repeated phrase in dance and it’s true. It certainly applies to the disappointments that follow from posting a cast list. Patience, understanding and persistence have a way of helping a dancer find her proper roll. *✂*



A limited number of books are available for pre-sale. \$20 includes a signed bookplate by illustrator, Robin Preiss Glasser. Proceeds benefit RDT. Orders must be placed by October 15, 2009. Books will be available after November 3, 2009. For more information please stop by RDT office.

## Student, Alumni, Faculty News and Information

Congratulations to **Christine Brown**, who received the 2009 Olivia Jackson McGee Award. She recently performed a company role in Carolina’s Ballet’s production of *Swan Lake*.

Congratulations to **Lydia Bevan** and **Kaylynne Leggett**, who received the Merilee Smith Young Dancer Award for summer study at RSB.

Congratulations to alum **Sarah Newton**, who received a full-tuition scholarship for summer study at the Atlanta Ballet’s Pre-Pro program. She graduated from Jordan High School in June and is an apprentice at Carolina Ballet.

Pennsylvania Ballet member **Laura Bowman** taught ballet and pointe classes at RSB summer intensive. She was recently featured in Peter Martins’ *Barber Violin Concerto*.

**Kathryn Roberts** taught modern classes at RSB summer intensive.

**Emily Proctor** a member of Aspen–Santa Fe Ballet performed a solo in Twyla Tharp’s *Sue’s Leg* at ADF this summer.

**Jessica Higgins** will perform with *The Berlin Wall Project* at the Kennedy Center in November.

**Lindsay Purrington** has rejoined Carolina Ballet as a second soloist.

**Gwendolyn Hunsberger** is working as a Health Promotion Specialist at Saint Luke’s Hospital in Kansas City, Mo. She married Mark Dunlap on August 15, 2009.

**Christa Palchinsky** recently earned a doctorate in physical therapy from the University of Miami.

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Alumni news or information?  
We would love to hear from you.  
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