

# Teacher finds dance brings balance to life

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By Jane Vranish Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

Everyone wants to achieve a certain balance in life, but dance teachers are more aware of it than most. Laura Lynn found that balance early on and has continued to check it periodically throughout her life.

Now celebrating 30 years in the dance business, the tall, lithe blonde first began by teaching disco to adults at a Richland community center while still in high school and, with her mother's help, soon expanded that to tap and jazz at the Richland Youth Foundation.



Rebecca Droke, Post-Gazette

**Girls perform in "The Princess Medley" during the Laura Lynn School of Dance recital at Pine-Richland High School in Pine.**

Originally a student with Fairgrievies School of Dance, she augmented her training with local dance icons Mario Melodia and Rosalene Kenneth, whom she credits teaching her "pizzazz and style on stage" and went on to perform in local musical theater productions.

Ms. Lynn began to establish a place for "every kind of dancer. Over the years you develop a rapport and a feeling with these kids," she says with a forceful voice that only comes with years of teaching. "It's a good positive atmosphere and it's all positive energy [because] what you do touches so many lives."

At The Laura Lynn School of Dance, she began to develop a reputation for "going all out," noting that props can take an average routine and make it something special. At her recent recital at Pine-Richland High School, that was apparent, with elaborate dances for all of the tiniest dancers.

The "Village Swallows" held circles made of flowers, similar to "The Garland Dance" found in "The Sleeping Beauty" and traditionally designed to feature the youngest students. The petite ballerinas displayed a strong sense of spacing as they moved into a continuing kaleidoscope of formations, difficult for any age.

Likewise with "The Princess Medley," which combined three classes in front of a pastel chiffon drape resembling a ballroom, and "The Flower Garden," where little buds flowered from giant flower pots.

She has trained the more advanced students for "competition in a healthy environment. That's what I like," Ms. Lynn said. "I want to have a program that works for whatever style of dance you want."

Whether it's the company students or the recreational students, Ms. Lynn wants them all to have a chance to take advantage of other options, be it dance team, cheerleading or high school musicals. And while they're learning to balance in a ballet position, they're learning to balance other areas of their lives.

Ms. Lynn learned that along the way, especially when she decided to start a family, which now includes Adam, 8, and Anna, 5, who just performed in her first recital.

With more than 400 students, Ms. Lynn "hits the floor running at 7 a.m. and doesn't stop 'til 11 p.m. I love motherhood -- it's one of the hardest jobs I've ever done," she said with a genuine enthusiasm.

At one point, she had more than 700 students and taught virtually every night, explaining that "it was time to mellow out a little." And when her mother died in 2002, Ms. Lynn had to take over the business end as well. "It's been five years and I still miss her all the time."

Ms. Lynn has seen that other things have changed. Dance technique is evolving. Fouettes, the whipping turns once a staple of prima ballerinas, are being taught at a younger and younger age. And fledgling dancers know a lot more about body and flexibility training.

Ms. Lynn conceded that, "even at my age, I'm still learning. My movement changes, my choreography changes. My ear for what I hear, how I teach never stops evolving. You never stop learning, because when you do, you stalemate." In her recital, she displayed an expert hand at moving her large classes around the stage in numbers like a romping tap dance to "Proud Mary" or the Calypso piece, "Aye' Carumba."

Whether company members or recreational students, all of the dancers seemed to enjoy performing in front of an audience. It's because everybody matters to Ms. Lynn, not just the talented dancer. As she put it, "I care about kids and what they get from it, not the bottom line. You could be the strongest technical dancer on earth, but if there isn't any passion, it's not worth looking at."

She recalled one of her most memorable students, who was so painfully shy when she began at age 9 that Ms. Lynn couldn't look at her without the girl cringing. But by the time she took the stage at the end of the year, she had a big smile on her face. As Ms. Lynn told the girl's mother, "I don't know if she will be a dancer, but that smile is worth a million bucks right there."