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January 20, 2010 / News / Park Slope

Dancewave is victimized by a travel agent scam

By Gersh Kuntzman

The Brooklyn Paper

A Park Slope youth dance troupe that was selected to perform at an elite international competition had its airfare money stolen by a fly-by-night travel agent — and it's unclear if the kids will be able to attend the prestigious event.

The head of Dancewave Studio told police last week that a \$8,585 check that was intended to cover some of the plane tickets for her two dozen teenage performers was stolen by a travel agent who claimed that she had booked and paid for the tickets through the Virginia office of Adam Travel Services, an international travel agency specializing in Islamic pilgrimages.



The Brooklyn Paper / Barry Shifrin

In happier times: Young dancers of Dancewave were all smiles when their troupe learned that it would be going to Scotland. But the money has been stolen by a rogue travel agent, cops say.

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A smaller amount of money was also stolen off of the Dancewave credit card by the same woman, said Diane Jacobowitz, the director of the 15-year-old troupe, which was to be the only American company at the prestigious 2010 Aberdeen International Youth Festival.

“We are sick to death about this,” Jacobowitz told The Brooklyn Paper on Tuesday. “These kids raised the money themselves, with a benefit concert and by even pooling their baby-sitting money. To be scammed like this is just horrifying.”

In a subsequent statement, Jacobowitz added, "While it is unfortunate that some people would steal money from children, Dancewave is working with its bank to recover the lost money. Dancewave guarantees that no parent or child will lose a penny. The trip to Scotland will take place as scheduled."

Here's how the scam went down, according to Jacobowitz.

Last month, she wrote a check for \$8,585 and authorized a credit card payment for a lesser amount to a "travel consolidator" who had been recommended by the parent of one of her dancers. That parent had used the consolidator for a trip to Jamaica, and the agent promised to book a block of tickets for the young dancers at a half-priced group rate.

Jacobowitz received receipts for the July bookings via e-mail, and was satisfied that the transaction was complete.

But on Jan. 15, she got a frenzied call from the parent who had recommended the travel consolidator telling her that the woman had never actually paid for the Jamaica ticket. Jacobowitz then went back to her travel documents, and sure enough, her booking receipts also indicated that the seats had been set aside, but had not been paid for.

"This whole thing is a tragedy," said Jacobowitz, who spent Tuesday telling parents the bad news. "Every time I think about this, I start to cry. These kids raised money by themselves. This is just so wrong."

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READER FEEDBACK

▽ [View discussion \(13\)](#)

Jane from Park Slope says:

They should have checked this person's references before signing over a check. In the future maybe it would be smart to book the tickets yourself or use a reputable agent with insurance.

This whole affair has sounded suspect from the start, and I for one am not surprised by how it's turned out.

There is really no one to blame but yourselves for your poor choice.

Wednesday, Jan 20, 2010 at 5:20 am

Rick from Park Slope says:

Jane you are way off base blaming the kids on this one. In the old drug days of Brooklyn some things were off limits. You didn't steal from old people, the Church or children. That would not fly and would have been dealt with in a Brooklyn beatdown. I guess Brooklyn has changed for the worst. I hope the kids can still make the trip and being from Brooklyn I'm sure someone will step up to the plate and bail them out. In the Brooklyn of yesteryear we were one big family, and if you hurt one you hurt all. Jane I would bet my life you are not from Brooklyn.

Wednesday, Jan 20, 2010 at 8:05 am

Big Brain from Reality says:

It's called "orbitz" people.

Wednesday, Jan 20, 2010 at 12:55 pm

jr from boerum hill says:

for travel (air) purchases, ALWAYS use a credit card

Wednesday, Jan 20, 2010 at 5:10 pm

Jane from Park Slope says:

@Rick, am born and raised in Brooklyn, though when I hear guys like you I wonder why I stil stay here. What are these drug days?
Brooklyn beatdown? Sorry, never given or recieved anyone.
Are you saying you stole from everyone but a church?
What you wrote is total nonsense, and I don't see what your former drug problem has to do with this dance troop paying cash to an unreputable, back door travle agency and then losing other people's money.
It was poorly done on their part and not at all responsible. I don't think that bailing them out would be a good idea. It's a hard lesson, but I think it's good for teens to learn responsibility.

Thursday, Jan 21, 2010 at 2:58 am

Rick from pk slope says:

Jane no I never robbed anyone and never had a drug problem but I have seen it all growing up in Brooklyn.....Just feel the kids should not be blamed.

Thursday, Jan 21, 2010 at 10:00 am

NS from Park Slope says:

Jane: How typical-blame the victim. Do you feel the same way about women who are raped, or victims of identify theft? Your remarks that "this endeavor was suspect from the start", and "you have no one to blame but yourselves" are callous, cynical and mean-spirited. It seems you are implying some level of wrongdoing on the part of this dance company? And saying that this is a valuable lesson for teens, so screw helping them out?

I am a parent of one of these dancers and have lost a great deal of money as a result of this scam, however I don't for a second feel that this is the fault of the kid. Should the head of the dance company been more saavy-sure-but again, there's no cause to deride someone for naive. How dare you! Do you know how hard these kids work, and how dedicated this company is? What happened to you in your life that makes you such a bitter, unsympathetic person? You should be ashamed. Your comments show teens the very unpleasant side of humanity.

Thursday, Jan 21, 2010 at 1:38 pm

bkparent from brooklyn says:

It is a sad story, both because of the result and because it was not necessary. The head of Dancewave has learned the hard way that you should not take risks with other people's money (especially money raised by students). In her wish to save money she used an unusual method recommended by word of mouth, without inquiring whether the parent who recommended this "travel consolidator" had actually been successful in her travel (turned out she had not). She took a big chance, and it is now the responsibility of the nice, but foolish, director to find a way to restore the money that the children raised.

Friday, Jan 22, 2010 at 7:01 am

David from Fort Greene says:

So what happened to the travel coordinator? Did she flee? Under investigation? That's a big part of the story missing from this article

Friday, Jan 22, 2010 at 7:26 am

Chante from Canarsie says:

These talented kids are very responsible! They are hardworkers and do very well in school. These kids don't deserve what happened to them. Have a heart, make a donation and help them get to Scotland.

If you need to see with your own eyes how talented they are, please come to one of their upcoming shows.

Friday, Jan 22, 2010 at 2:50 pm

anon from brooklyn says:

Chante,

The kids are great but the director looks pretty dumb right now. How can people give her more money for the trip after she was so careless last time! The director needs to put forward a plan to get tickets that makes sense so people can see she can be trusted to do it right this time.

Saturday, Jan 23, 2010 at 8:34 am

Chante from Canarsie says:

Look if she loses the money again it's no big deal. It's not like it's her money or anything. And these kids are so talented, they should be allowed to lose as much money as they want.

Sunday, Jan 24, 2010 at 2:10 pm

The Real Chante from Canarsie says:

Please be advised that I did not post the comment below. Yes, the kids are very talented! No, they did not lose the money...they earned the money!

To the impostor who used my name to post the comment below, I have one word for you..COWARD!!!

Chante from Canarsie says:

Look if she loses the money again it's no big deal. It's not like it's her money or anything. And these kids are so talented, they should be allowed to lose as much money as they want.

Report abuseSunday, Jan 24, 2010 at 2:10 pm

Wednesday, Jan 27, 2010 at 5:57 pm