



THE NEW WAVE OF DANCEWAVE

There is no question that Brooklyn, especially Park Slope, has made its contribution to the arts. It has given rise to great and important film makers, painters, authors, poets and performers. It is home to the glorious arts institutions of Brooklyn Academy of Music and The Brooklyn Museum of Art. We know this, we celebrate and appreciate the fact that Brooklyn is no small contender in contributions to various forms of media. But why is our neighborhood so artistically fertile? BY ALEXANDRA COMO SAGHIR | PHOTOS BY TOURE FOLKES

Why do we have a propensity to establish greatness, or, at the very least, creativity? The answer is simple. Look around. Babies and children dominate the demographic here and the parents of these children are encouraging, if not grooming, our youngest population to become artists, perhaps, even, great ones. We have these opportunities for our children because Park Slope is home to courageous and innovative organizations such as Dancewave.

Dancewave was founded in 1995 by creative and artistic director, Diane Jacobowitz, as a non-profit to create substantially artistic and pre-professional dance education for young people. Not just another dance school that churns out final recitals for parents to video, Dancewave's dance

companies (not the classes, some of which are held at the Old First Church on Seventh Avenue and Carroll Street) are audition-based and the organization is serious about students continuing their dance education and going to college through its Kids Cafe Goes To College Program. Dancewave is comprised of three dance companies: Dancewave Company for ages 12-18, Dancewave Company II, for more advanced dancers of the same ages who will focus on technique and choreography, and The Young Movers Ensemble, for ages 10-13 so that this precariously impressionable age group can also get a positive and progressive dance education. All students are treated as "real" dancers, or as legitimate young adults, which is clearly evidenced by the fact that choreographers, "real"

choreographers, such as Mark Morris and Twyla Tharp, to name but a few, have come in to choreograph and teach these young dancers. So legitimate in fact is this dance school that it was selected to represent the United States in The Aberdeen International Youth Festival in Scotland this summer where young artists, musicians and dancers from all over the world perform. It was the only group selected from the US.

The idea of a dance company for young people originated from a dance performance festival for young people from all over Brooklyn, called Kids Cafe when Diane, who had her own dance company for close to a decade, became a mother. Struggling with the simultaneous challenges of motherhood and running a company she established a happy medium for herself called Kids Cafe. Now, the proud mother of a college freshman, she has seen the fruits of her labor grow exponentially and is helping the young dancers in her company get to college as well through yet another innovative program called Kid's Cafe Festival Goes To College. The festival, which was hosted by the renown David Dorfman, allows the chairs of leading dance departments from prestigious colleges such as Julliard, NYU and Rutgers and the young dancers to get to know one another and discuss their futures, academic requirements and



ambitions. Round table discussions about going to college and master classes are offered as well. Many of the young people in Dancewave would not ordinarily have the chance to consider college since most of the company's demographic comes from low-income families or poorly performing public schools.

The impact of Dancewave on our community does not stop with Kids Cafe Festival. Dancewave also has garnered city funding and Department of Education support to get inside public schools as a company in residence and offer ten to twelve week classes in public schools throughout the city in diverse neighborhoods. "It has been proven that dance in education improves grades by improving focus and providing something physical," says Diane and she is adamant that kids of all ages be provided the tools to express themselves physically. "Every human being comes into the world wanting to move and it's only natural to want to express who you are through ownership of the body," she states. Diane encourages mothers and fathers, especially parents of boys, to get their kids

moving. She says, "it's a tragedy when gender role stereotypes get pushed down on kids."

Dancewave's commitment to getting children to dance, no matter how young, has led to the newly established Tadpole Dancers Program for babies and toddlers 5 months to 3 years old. "We want them before they're ten," says Diane, smiling, "it's never too early and I wish I had something like this when I was a new mother." This program offers mothers, fathers, and caregivers the opportunity to bond with their child through movement and meet other new parents in a creative and fun setting. These classes are as much for the adults attending as the children and everyone must participate, so sleep deprived parents and shy people be warned: you will be told to get up and move if you do not on your own. This babies and tots movement program stands out because the instructors of this age group are particularly well versed in Early Childhood Development and dance education and most are professional dancers themselves. One of the Tadpole Program's challenges has been competing with nap schedules – but don't worry, Dancewave has a flexible make-up and payment policy should you find your little one drowsy during drum circle (while props and instruments are sometimes used, the focus of program lies purely on the use of the body as the sole form of expression). Dancewave will host an open house for this program on September 14th at their storefront at 45 Fourth Avenue where parents will be able to take a free class and meet instructors and have any questions answered (pre-registration is required).

Diane Jacobowitz is graceful, yet plucky (she was, after all, born on The Lower East Side) and she speaks about her dancers as if they were her own children. She emanates tranquility and would tell young dancers who are considering quitting, "Dance is a source of peace and self-love and you have the rest of your life to regret not dancing... follow your dreams and your heart and keeps what makes you happy in what you do." As serene as Diane is, however she is also a tough leader. When a dishonest travel agent swindled the company out of \$9,000 for their trip to the Aberdeen International Youth festival she refused to let that dampen the dancers' spirits; the young adults had worked very hard to raise the money for the air fare, even contributing their own babysitting money, and they were crushed. Diane knew that they would push through and rise above the disappointment; they had no choice. Calls for help went out and eventually not only did they get the money back from the dirty agent, they carried on and raised an additional \$20,000.

Partnerships with local businesses and more opportunities for the public to view the ensembles' performances are in the works and will certainly ensure Dancewave's continued impact on our community. In the meantime we Park Slopers should be proud to have yet another great venue of arts and arts education in our very own neighborhood.

To learn more about Dancewave or to catch a performance please visit www.dancewave.org.