



Kelsey Boyer leads her dance students in stretching exercises. PHOTOS BY AMANDA THOMPSON

Dance moves

Nims students waltz into the future with poise

Amanda Thompson
Council on Culture & Arts

England’s George IV was a well-known trendsetter and style maker. He wore his natural hair as opposed to a powdered wig and favored trousers instead of knee breeches. Scandalized by his unconventional choices, excessive lifestyle, and extravagant parties, his contemporaries often ridiculed his ostentation.

One of his most scathing criticisms came in 1816 after a ball he hosted in London. A new dance was included in the evening’s festivities and The Times reported in a vicious editorial the following day that this “indecent foreign dance” amounted to an “obscene display” and a “fatal contagion.”

The dance was the waltz.

Two hundred years later, the waltz is still alive and well and students at Nims Middle School are carrying on the tradition. This year marks dance teacher Kelsey Boyer’s third at the school and many of her students have been with her that entire time. “I thought to myself, what else can I introduce them to in terms of dance? Last year, I asked them what else they’d like to learn. Some of them said ‘what about ballroom dance?’”

As a classically trained ballet



Christopher Smith gently leads his partner in the waltz at Nims Middle School.

See DANCE, Page 8C

Dance

Continued from Page 1C

dancer, that was a tall order for Boyer but she was up to the challenge, though not all of her students were quite as eager. "I was trying to explain to them, you're going to have to partner up and touch each other. At first, they were kind of like no," but Boyer explained "this is going to help you later on in life. When you get older, the girls are going to be so impressed."

That argument reinforced what eighth-grader Ja'Quan Teramean already knew and he has used the same logic. "I have a brother who doesn't know how to dance so I help him just in case he has to dance with females. He needs to learn how to do that." Ja'Quan not only teaches others, he also creates his own choreography which he performs and posts on social media. Though he's inspired by icons like Michael Jackson, Ja'Quan keeps coming back to Boyer's class.

"I love it," he said simply. "I've learned all the ballet steps and hip-hop dances too. I love those. It feels good, makes me feel special. I think it should be part of every school because everyone is forgetting the dances throughout history. Ms. Boyer, she helps us learn all those dances."

Along with the fundamental elements and principles of dance, Boyer also focuses on her students' social development and she helps them hone interpersonal skills. "I work on bringing them together as a whole. I think it's important for them because I see they do a lot of picking on each other, playfully in some ways, but they need to learn to be a little more tolerant of each other and be more open and willing to embrace other people and be close to one another," said Boyer.

Seventh-grader Christopher Smith appreciates the opportunity to make new connections. "It's fun to know different types of dances because you get to know different types of people and their feelings through the dance. You can learn a lot about people through

their movements. We get to know what everybody's favorite move is." Christopher's favorite move is the boogaloo.

Boyer's favorite genre to teach is ballet because "that's my first love but they've got me enjoying teaching hip-hop as well." She also teaches jazz, modern, and line dances but she especially loves creating choreography for her students and she'll often learn from them. "They'll teach me the social dances that they're doing."

Each genre has its own essential style but common among them all is the need for physical strength, agility, and balance as well as spatial and kinesthetic awareness. "I have a lot of athletes," said Boyer.

"I have one student who plays just about every sport and he talks about how dance helps him with his coordination and controlling his body and stretching. They're at an age where things are changing. This gives them a way to control their body when a lot of things in their life are out of their control. Dance helps to make them more comfortable and gives them a confidence about themselves," said Boyer.

She added, "a lot of my students don't have a way to express themselves. I feel like this is giving them an alternate outlet that they didn't know about before. It opens their eyes that there is another way to express yourself. Even if you're not a technically trained dancer, you can still use it as an expression and as an art form."

Harmyni Sutton echoed that assertion and as an eighth-grader, she's taken full advantage of Nims' dance program for the past three years. She is beaming from the moment she enters the studio until the dismissal bell rings. "I've been dancing since I was little. It's a way for me to express my feelings. If something builds up inside you, you can get loose. It helps me get things off my chest without getting trouble. It's fun to dance with people that I love. I don't know what I would do without dancing."

Amanda Karioth Thompson is the Assistant Director for the Council on Culture & Arts. COCA is the capital area's umbrella agency for arts and culture (www.tallahasseearts.org).



Harmyni Sutton dances the waltz with her partner. AMANDA THOMPSON