

The Commercial Appeal

The Joy of Dance is Pure

Classical remixed with hip-hop enchants

By Linda K. Bourassa
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When you bring children together after school in a professional dance environment where classical music co-mingles with hip-hop rhythms in the hallways, it can be magical.

You have arrived at New Ballet Ensemble and School (NBE), tucked away in the coolly refurbished Pie Factory on York Avenue in the Cooper-Young district.

A recent Friday afternoon was a good example -- girls from Girl's Inc. practiced the opening to Tchaikovsky's "Nutcracker" while boys learned break dance in the red studio and fourth-year ballet students prepared for their next class -- all under the same roof.

Watching scholarship recipient Brianna Brown of Downtown, study ballet is a lesson in how a child's focus on an important goal can bring immense satisfaction into a young life. It's also important to those who witness her progress, especially her mother and grandparents who help Brianna arrive on time, dressed and ready to step up to the barre as a student of ballet -- with an eye on a

college scholarship or professional career in dance.

During this holiday season, she appeared with Madeline Bradley of Midtown and Harlan Hutton of East Memphis in the NBE production of "Nut ReMix" at the Buckman Performing Arts Center.

The goal of the NBE program is to have one scholarship student for every paying student, in a program that represents the city's demographics.

The NBE facility at 2157 York, was an empty shell of a building just a few months ago. The renovation was accomplished with the creative design of architect, Michael Walker, JBHM Architects and the general contracting skills of Grinder-Haizlip Construction.

They worked with Katie Smythe Thinnes, founding artistic director, on this project to create a safe and creative environment that includes state of the art flooring for the protection of young bodies. Safety was a high priority as was ample space for the students to finish homework between rehearsals or before classes each day.



Nine-year-olds Madeline Bradley, Harlan Hutton and Brianna Brown, students at New Ballet Ensemble, recently appeared in the holiday production of "Nut ReMix" at the Buckman Performing Arts Center. The show is a variation on the holiday favorite, "The Nutcracker", with tunes by Otis Redding, Ray Charles and others combined with Tchaikovsky's classics.

For more information on the New Ballet Ensemble, visit their website at newballet.org.

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