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A Tale of Two Studios: Dancers Leave Imprint in Urban and Rural Communities

While New York City and the Adirondack Mountains may seem like worlds apart, Choreographer Rebecca Kelly believes one thing remains universal in any location: a passion for dance.

Kelly, a long-time dancer who received formative training at the Washington School of Ballet, first embarked on her dance “journey” through co-founding Rebecca Kelly Ballet (RKB) with her husband Craig Brashear in 1979.

Dedicated to the creation and performance of original ballets, the pair launched its home studio in New York City at a time when “the area was teeming with artists and dancers,” said Kelly.

It was at that studio that the pair began their mission to strengthen communities through participation in the arts. By fusing classical dance with modern, with themes ranging from the environment to poetical works, RKB also helped to unveil individuality within a culturally diverse group of dancers.

It wasn’t until Kelly received an invitation to the Lake Placid Center for the Arts in 1986 that changed RKB’s relationship with the Adirondack region – and its residing dancers’ future – forever.



Scene change to the Adirondacks

RKB accepted the Lake Placid Center for the Arts’ first invitation to be Artists-in-Residence more than 25 years ago – and has been in residence every summer since. Recognizing the need to introduce and nourish innovative and community dance initiatives to the underserved Adirondack region, RKB pioneered extensive programs for rural youth in Clinton, Franklin, Essex and St. Lawrence counties, as well as developing its ONSTAGE dance day camp.

After Kelly and Brashear reached 35 years of touring, performing and teaching, in 2009, they acquired an historic anchor building located in the region in a continued effort to support and stimulate Main Street revitalization in the Adirondack area, as well as to address regional health issues due to obesity and lack of extra-curricular activities.

Determined to use their legacy and expertise to restore the building – known as the Tahawus Center – Kelly and Brashear are currently working to create a dance and wellness center in the top floor of the three-story space. Through grants as well as individual contributions and volunteer efforts, significant progress has been made, including dramatic changes to the street-level floor to enable the hosting of cultural activities while the community awaits further renovation.

“It is our goal to share the richness of dance and put down roots in this region to provide residents a window to creativity, health and education,” said Brashear.

American Harlequin’s long-term support

Today, as Broadway hopefuls continue to usher into RKB’s New York City-based studio, instructors are not the only thing supporting their dreams: this studio is outfitted with a 23- x 40-foot Harlequin floor, which was installed by co-founder Brashear himself in 1988. Primarily used for rehearsals, choreography, and instruction in modern dance and ballet, including pointe work, the Harlequin floor has stood the test of time.

“The hundreds of dancers who have jetted and pirouetted across Harlequin’s floor for more than two decades at our studio love it,” said Kelly.

As RKB continues pave the path for New York City-based dancers with the help of its Harlequin floor, the installation of a dance floor for Tahawus Center is not too far behind.

Continuing the dance journey

While Kelly and Brashear anticipate the future of Tahawus Center and its positive impact on the community, they continue to spread the message of dance among other youth as well.

Kids Co-Motion, founded by the couple in 1992, is an early childhood movement program design to bring families together in dance and music. The program has been adopted by Riverdale Neighborhood House, Riverdale NY, and the Lamm Institute Preschool in Brooklyn for children with developmental delays as well as by several preschools throughout the New York City region. Kelly has also authored Dancing with Delight, a teacher and parenting guide to positive learning experiences and dance for the young child.

Through these initiatives, as well RKB, it is clear that dance really can make the world go round, regardless of age or location.

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