



BEHIND THE SCENES

a publication of the Board of Directors

AMHERST BALLET THEATRE COMPANY

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NOVEMBER 2006

from your DIRECTOR

A towering tree grows from a tiny seed if conditions are favorable. While reading founder Therese Brady Donohue's thoughts (see page 2) about the 30th anniversary of our company and the 35th of our school, I was struck that a community treasure grew from one woman's desire to provide dance training for her own children. Years ago Therese didn't anticipate that her early endeavors would result in such success for herself and her dancers and provide a satisfying career that lasted more than thirty years. Yes, conditions were favorable; Amherst is an incredible place to be an artist.

Therese's history became interwoven with mine when we met in 1996 during one of my trips to Amherst to visit relatives. Impressed with Amherst Ballet and eager to join the faculty, I moved here with my family and continued my dance career. Conditions were ripe for me to establish roots at AB, and the tree continued to branch out and grow new limbs. For a period of time Therese and I worked together sharing a history and collaborating in the creation of such works as *The Magician's Nephew* (2000), *The Very Lonely Firefly* (2003) and *The Honeybee and the Robber* (2004). The solid foundation she built provided AB with a basis for continued growth. Together with a consistently outstanding Board of Directors, a fantastic Office Manager (Andrea Leibson) and an excellent staff, Amherst Ballet has continued to grow and redefine itself. In ten years, our annual budget has grown from about \$55,000 to more than \$200,000. Our enrollment has increased from 90 students in 1996 to 200 last year. Our artistic programs maintain a high level of excellence and continue to be innovative and collaborative.

Perhaps what is most valuable about Amherst Ballet is that it continues to provide a "nest" for the young dancers who find a second home within its walls.

PHOTOGRAPH BY CLIVE J. MEALEY



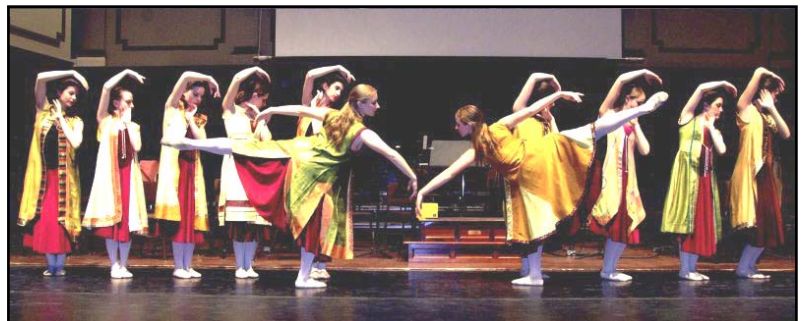
Catherine Fair

Year after year, I watch as they become leaders of the school. Once tiny children grow taller than I and graciously take their places as accomplished young people in a perpetual rhythm that take its course as naturally as the seasons change. Although this is the natural flow of life, it never ceases to amaze me and I relish its predictability and beauty. The stories of our lives are interwoven; the history that continues to unfold for me is connected to and touches many others who are creating their own life stories.

As always, it is an incredible privilege to be a force in so many lives -- each growing its own new limbs as a part of our tree that stretches toward the sky.

Our anniversary year will continue Amherst Ballet's distinguished history by showcasing the various forms of dance we have become known for during our *Celebration of Dance* at Bowker Auditorium March 17 and 18, 2007. Faculty member and choreographer Sam Kenney is setting variations from the classical ballet *Don Quixote* on 12 company dancers. Faculty member Joanna Duncan is creating original Hungarian Character Dances on older dancers from the company and younger dancers from the Lower School. Last year's premiere of *Dances from the Earth* will be performed again including the dynamic *Rainforest* (choreography by Sam Kenney and Jackie Kinsman) and a restaging of *The Arctic* (choreography by John Wrzos-Bancan and me).

Conditions have indeed been favorable and we invite you to watch Amherst Ballet blossom in the future.



PHOTOGRAPH BY JEFF BANCAN

The Firebird at Springfield Symphony Hall (April 2006)

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from Amherst Ballet's Founder

THERESE BRADY DONOHUE



Therese Brady Donohue

I never dreamed when I started Amherst Ballet 35 years ago and co-founded Pioneer Valley Ballet that both organizations would survive for so many years. I never had a business strategy or a dream, just a venue for my three girls to dance and perform in Amherst. I did what any mother would do when she has to uproot her family and move to another state and try to continue what her children love to do. My children loved to dance and I was a ballet teacher so I unintentionally created a school for them. While it grew successfully, my children graduated from high school and my oldest became a professional ballerina. My middle girl became a piano accompanist and receptionist at Amherst Ballet and my youngest a good choreographer. I guess you could call it

a family business. My oldest came back to choreograph and appear as guest artist in Company galas at the Fine Arts Center. My youngest choreographed and toured with my Company to Eastern Europe in 1985. Eventually, my oldest married and moved away but continued to teach ballet. As an undergraduate, my youngest founded a dance company at Northwestern University. Sadly, I lost my middle daughter, at the age of 30, to complications stemming from childhood cancer. After my divorce in the late 1980's, I was on my own to finally create a business out of Amherst Ballet that would have to support me.

The rest is history as Amherst Ballet continued to expand and grow into what it continues to be today. I have always been proud of the faculty that Amherst Ballet has been able to hire. For a small non-professional company Amherst Ballet has outdone itself with ambitious performances that, at times, exceed the standards of small professional companies. The quality of training has always been at the top of the list and still is. Diversifying training in modern and jazz dance has become as important to students as their ballet training. The students that Amherst Ballet had and continues to nurture are well trained dancers and good academic students, and young people who learn how to multi-task, willingly adapting to each choreographer's style, and are considerate of others.

When it was time for me to retire after 33 years, I knew that Catherine Fair could move the company forward in a style that works for our community. She has made it to the 30 year mark for the company and the 35 year mark for the school and I wish her, the faculty, staff, and all the students at Amherst Ballet congratulations and best wishes for the future. I am very proud of what I established and what Amherst Ballet continues to do.

ThanksThanksThanks! This newsletter will serve as one of our fundraising appeals. Please use the enclosed contribution envelope to show your support.

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Q & A with Senior HANNAH GOODWIN

Interview by Leigh Dunlap

AB: When did you begin dancing and what got you started?

HG: I began dancing in 5th or 6th grade doing jazz at New England Dance Quarters. My mom noticed that I danced around the house as a young girl, so she signed me up for a jazz class. As a child my mother gave me a lot of opportunities, and dance was the one that stuck.

AB: How long have you been dancing at AB?

HG: I've been dancing at Amherst Ballet since 6th grade. At that time, I was only taking one jazz class a week, but that soon expanded into many classes because of one question: my jazz teacher asked me what first position was, and because I had never taken a ballet class, I had no idea. I loved dancing. I realized that in order to continue, I needed to start taking ballet, so I enrolled in a teen beginner ballet class and discovered that it was a pretty natural thing for me to do.

AB: How has AB affected your life?

HG: Because I spend so much time at the studio, I've made some great friendships. I am so thankful for the performance opportunities that Amherst Ballet has given me. Performing is one of my favorite things to do in life. I get such a rush that is unlike anything else. The amount of rehearsing that we put into shows can make my social life almost nonexistent. When friends that I haven't seen a lot of come to my shows and see what I've been doing, it makes it all worth it because they are always impressed with the quality of work that we do at Amherst Ballet.

AB: What performances do you most value when you look back on them?

HG: Sam Kenney made me the happiest person alive by casting me in *Forge* when I was in 8th grade. It was only my first year having Sam as a teacher, so it was such an honor and a compliment for her to cast me in the piece. I remember my parents being so proud of me. Another fond memory was doing *Shim Chung* and *Swan Lake* in 10th grade. Both pieces were absolutely amazing to perform because we were at the Fine Arts Center and they were so much fun to dance.

AB: What will be your roles in the upcoming March performances?

HG: I'm in *Don Quixote* as a demi-soloist, in *The Rainforest* and in the senior piece that the seniors are choreographing.

AB: What have you learned from being a dancer and what other influences have enhanced your dancing?

HG: Dancing has made me so much more self-confident. I've learned about commitment and I understand the benefits of working really hard to accomplish a goal. I have such a big appreciation for dancers in performances I go to because I know what moves they're doing and just how hard the moves are, even though they make them look effortless. As far as influences, all the girls that I dance with are my influences. I see them do things that are absolutely amazing, so I try to do it like they did. We all learn from each other's mistakes and successes.

AB: What are your plans for the future? Does dance figure in it?

HG: I'm applying to five or six colleges (Union, Colgate, Saint Michael's, UVM, Smith and maybe University of Rochester) for the fall of 2007. I am going in as a pre-med student, but I am by no means tied down to that idea. I am extremely interested in medicine, but also in many other things. I've been dancing for so long that it is extremely hard to picture my life without it because it makes me so happy. When I dance, all I think about is the combination. Every dance class is a mini-vacation for me.



PHOTOGRAPH BY E. S. FAIR

Amherst Ballet Fall Picnic was Fun for All!

By Jeanne Esposito

On the magically beautiful Sunday afternoon of September 17, Amherst Ballet dancers and their families gathered for a picnic. About 75 people visited and laughed, played volleyball, and fell out of the hammock. We made new friends, and made new dancers welcome. The cookout and bring-a-dish took place in the South Amherst yard of Jessamy Karras (Level 5) and Lia Karras (Level B). Ballet Dad George Karras, manned the grill with support from Dave Moskin and Tom Dumm. Lots of people brought the school favorite, fudge brownies. The picnic was organized by me along with Joy Howard, Annette Cycon and Heidi Stemple. We had so much fun that we look forward to holding it again. Thanks to everyone who pitched in to help.



Senior interview with

MOLLY STAMELL

by Annette Cycon

Molly Stamell came to Amherst Ballet in eighth grade, but she has been dancing since she was very young. She started taking African dance classes at three years old, and since then has studied with “every major African dance teacher in the area” and still loves African dance. Molly went on to take tap, jazz and ballet at another local dance school. When she joined Amherst Ballet, she began by focusing on ballet, and then “discovered modern.”

Molly is known at Amherst Ballet for her love of modern dance. She describes modern dance as a style that allows her to include everything she has learned in her diverse background as a dancer. “I love how I use my technical (ballet) training in modern, but the movement is much freer and more grounded. Ballet is very ‘up’ and African is centered on the ground. It’s less about lifting up than gathering from the ground. (This is because) in Africa, the gods are centered in the earth. In modern dance I can use everything I have ever learned.”

Molly currently takes one ballet, one jazz, and one modern class. She also takes a weekly yoga class, which she recommends as a perfect complement to dance. Yoga has improved her flexibility and strength as a dancer, as well as providing relaxation and stress relief. “After a good yoga class, I feel like I’ve worked out, but I’m energized, not exhausted.”

Her most memorable performance was *Shim Chung*, where she was a silver fish, dancing on an aerial wire high above the stage and the audience. “It was the most powerful dance experience I’ll ever have, being in the performance, but also being able to watch it from above. I was bruised and it hurt, but it was worth it. After months of working on *Shim Chung*, being up on the strings was the final part. It was so emotional that night when we went up for the first time. Everyone who was watching was so moved. It was so beautiful. We all got really close doing that piece. It was also special for me to get to do it with my sister.” (Kate was also dancing on the aerial wire.)

Molly also speaks highly about her summer dance experiences at Bates College in Maine. She attended this dance program for three years and loved the atmosphere, the focus on dance and the wonderful friends she made there.

Molly is a senior at Amherst High School. She hopes to go to college in Montreal to major in pre-school education and continue to take lots of different dance classes. She has danced in many different environments and appreciates her time at Amherst Ballet. She feels the training here is strong, that there is real caring for individual dancers, and that the school is accommodating to girls whose interest in dance extends beyond classical ballet. She also feels that the girls form “a tight group and everyone gets along with each other.” Molly, thank you for the passion, dedication and genuine warmth you have brought to the classroom, stage and community at Amherst Ballet. We will miss you.

Thanks to Jane Yolen, co-author of the Barefoot Book of Ballet Stories, as well many other award-winning books, for her sponsorship of this newsletter.



News from former faculty...

JACKIE KINSMAN

Jackie is finally getting settled in Knoxville, TN with her husband. She’s teaching two ballet classes and one tap class at the University of Tennessee. Jackie’s also enjoying working at two local dance schools that share the same philosophy about strong ballet technique as Amherst Ballet. She’s joined Circle Modern Dance, a local dance company in Knoxville, and is looking forward to choreographing and performing for their upcoming December show. We will be seeing Jackie again soon when she returns to Amherst Ballet in December to rehearse the dancers for *The Rainforest* in preparation for the upcoming performances of *Dances from the Earth*.

Senior interview with CAROLINA DEGROOT

by Jocelyn M. Cuffee

Carolina DeGroot is a multi-talented young woman who brings an international perspective to the Amherst Ballet family. Carolina has been dancing with Amherst Ballet since she was six years old when she took a pre-primary class that sparked her love of dancing. Carolina has continued to dance since then and has excelled as a dancer. She is an honor student at Amherst Regional High School where she has performed in various musicals and plays, and she was a member of the high school's cross country team. Carolina participated in a dance camp at Bates College in Maine this past summer and will be involved with a student-choreographed Hip Hop production at Amherst Regional High School. She is currently enrolled in jazz, modern, and conditioning classes at AB.

Carolina is a world traveler and she and her family lived in Norway for six months when her father was on sabbatical. She traveled to Australia last summer, and loves to explore new places and meet people from different cultures around the world. Her love of different cultures has helped Carolina with some of the roles that she has danced as an Amherst Ballet student. Carolina has performed twice as a Chinese dancer in *Moscow Ballet's Nutcracker Ballet* in 2002 and 2003, and she has also had roles in *The Magician's Nephew* in 2002, *Forge*, *Theorem*, *Ribbon Festival*, *Nature's*

Waltz, and *Miles a la Mode*. Carolina also performed in *Dances from the Earth's Rainforest* in Spring 2006, a performance that she will repeat in Spring 2007.

Although Carolina is a world traveler, she wants to attend a college that is within driving distance of her family in Amherst, Massachusetts. Carolina has varied interests, but she thinks that she wants to study graphic design. She is currently looking at colleges that have arts programs where she can continue to take dance classes. Carolina is looking at colleges like Syracuse University, Northeastern University, University of Delaware, and the University of Massachusetts, but she is keeping her options open. Carolina DeGroot is an exceptional young woman who will continue to succeed in the future, no matter what path she chooses as a dancer, student, and a citizen of the world.

Many exciting changes at Amherst Ballet...

AB has seen many improvements in the past year.

- **Susan Waite, Mitch Gaslin, Karen Schweitzer and Tom Dumm** painted the lobby a cheery color.
- **Amherst Woodworking and Arrowwood Construction** built new storage and seating in the lobby.
- **Pat Russell and Kara Leistyna** created bright comfy cushions for the new seats.
- **Amherst Maintenance** refinished the lobby floors.
- **Delcie Bean and Valley ComputerWorks** helped Amherst Ballet go wireless!
- **Norma and Al Geller and everyone who contributed to the Geller Challenge** purchased a wonderful new, state-of-the-art dance floor for the upstairs studio.
- **Surner Heating** delighted our summer classes and camps with the installation of air conditioning in the upstairs studio.
- **Jack and Alex Wileden and Chris Dahlinger** made the upstairs studio seem larger by removing a storage closet and **Amherst Glass** added more mirrors.
- **Robin and Ted Diamond, Tom Dumm, Dave Moskin and Peter and Brandan Shea** cleaned up the downstairs dressing room.
- **Dance Stuff** donated additional storage which **Jack Wileden** installed in the downstairs dressing room.
- **Tom Dumm** arranged for a much needed dump visit with a friend's truck.
- **William Clark Excavating** improved our driveway, **Shumway Tree Service** removed tree branches and **Dave Moskin, Mitch Gaslin and Alex Wileden** spent hours clearing brush and braving bugs, poison ivy and sharp tools in Phase I of AB's Outdoor Beautification Project.

As you can see, a lot of people have been involved in Amherst Ballet's transformation. What would we have done without them all? It is so heartening to see the community come together to help make Amherst Ballet a cheery, professional place for our students, staff and families. And we've only just begun...!



PHOTOGRAPH BY E. S. FAIR

Summer at Amherst Ballet

by Catherine Fair

Summer is becoming a busier and busier place at Amherst Ballet as we expand our summer programs. This year we had two very successful children's workshop camps. In June I worked with local artist and teacher Annie Figliola and faculty member Jackie Kinsman to offer *Victorian Fantasy*. Fourteen students between the ages of five and ten spent one week learning choreography, creating and building sets and props, and rehearsing for the end of the week performance. The performance was based upon the book, *The House on the Hill* by Christin Couture, which tells the story of a group of children who wander into an unoccupied Victorian house and spend a day exploring and discovering what life was like during the Victorian Era. The students danced the roles of the children as they discovered an old library, had a tea party, played "dress up" after discovering clothes and accessories in an old trunk, danced in a parlor filled with ornate mirrors, and waltzed together. As part of the art class, they created "stained glass" windows that decorated the "theater" (our lower studio), built intricate mirrors, created the Victorian wallpaper and front door sets, made their own elaborate hats, and more. It was so much fun, and the kids learned a little bit about history as well!



Victorian Fantasy (Childrens' Workshop, Summer 2006)

Later in July, faculty member Joanna Duncan created a fun workshop based upon the story of the birth of the Firebird. The sixteen dancers were beautiful in the Amherst Ballet costumes that Joanna altered to fit them (she also donated several costumes of her own to the production.) Level Five dancer Mira Farkas, in the role of the baby Firebird, was joined by a variety of birds, fairies, woodland animals and will 'o wisp fairies. Jackie Kinsman and I created the choreography that told the original story that Joanna created, while Joanna taught the art classes. During art the dancers created the beautiful backdrops that decorated the "theater", created firebird headpieces, learned about the intricacies of costume fitting and altering, and created their own beautiful versions of the Firebird herself with glitter paint, and rhinestones. The children accomplished so much in one week, and the faculty enjoyed themselves too!



The Firebird (Childrens' Workshop, Summer 2006)

In August, Orlando Ballet Principal Dancer Jessica Rindone Sibley was back by popular demand. Jessica was a guest artist in the role of Odette/Odile in our 2005 production of *Swan Lake*. In residence for two weeks teaching classical ballet and pointe, repertoire, choreography and ballet conditioning, Jessica worked the dancers very hard, but emphasized that she felt the dancers had improved greatly in technique from the previous summer. Both students and faculty are very proud of the praise we received and liked hearing that Amherst Ballet dancers are on a level that matches that of the many students from around the world whom Jessica taught in the Orlando Ballet Summer Program prior to arriving at Amherst Ballet. Joanna Duncan, (classical ballet, pointe, repertoire and ballet conditioning) and Sam Kenney (classical ballet, pointe, repertoire and Modern Dance) joined Jessica as members of the AB summer faculty; the three made a great team! The students learned so much, worked extremely hard, and (as in the past) had rave reviews for Jessica and her warm, open teaching style. Yolanda Martin, a reporter from *The Springfield Republican*, spent a day visiting and observing our classes. The result was an informative feature article with color pictures of our teachers and dancers.

Throughout the summer, ballet technique classes were offered at the intermediate and advanced level for dancers ages 13 through adult. At the request of several Lower School Parents, I also taught six weeks of children's classes for dancers ages eight through ten. These classes were a delight; our young dancers accelerated greatly while getting to meet new students since many of the enrollees were guests from other local and national dance schools.



Jessica Sibley leading Teen Intensive Workshop (Summer 2006)

Senior interview with ELIZA ARSENAULT

by Annette Cycon

Eliza Arsenault, senior at Amherst High School, was a “pinkie” in pre-primary when she was five years old. This, she is proud to claim, means that she has been at Amherst Ballet longer than anyone else in the building. Amherst Ballet truly is Eliza’s “home away from home.” She loves the community of the school as well as “how seriously they take dancers here. I know I could walk into any professional dance class and follow along.” She takes five classes every week; three ballet, one jazz and one modern. She loves all the dance forms for their uniqueness in movement. Eliza appreciates the confidence that years of performing have given her, and speaks thoughtfully about the relationship she feels with the audience when she performs.

“When I’m on stage looking out, my energy goes out and I can feel myself light up. It’s so exhilarating! I know the audience is looking at me and I want to give them a good performance, something special. I’m there for them but they are there for me too. Once the music starts I stop thinking about what I have to do, my body just moves naturally, without being nervous or having to think about it. Then I concentrate on the audience and really performing for them. It’s the audience that really brings out the best in me - and the bigger the audience the better, like The Fine Arts Center!”

Eliza also loves the bonding among the dancers that happens in the process of creating a performance. Months of rehearsing together, working hard, perfecting their choreography are all worth it. “Especially the last week before a performance, with dress and tech rehearsals, we live together, eat together and get really close while we put the final touches on the performance.” When asked about the actual performance, Eliza just lights up and laughs! “It’s amazing!” Memorable performances were *The Magician’s Nephew*, “because it was our first story ballet”, *Forge*, “because it was the first long, more complicated jazz piece” she danced in, and *Swan Lake* “because it was so impressive and beautiful!”

Eliza’s future plans include finding a college where she might minor in dance. “I just can’t imagine myself not dancing, it’s been such a big part of my life. My next goal is to learn ballroom dancing!”

Eliza is looking forward to performing *Don Quixote* this spring. She is also excited about choreographing and performing a piece with her seven fellow seniors. This is the largest group ever of seniors graduating from Amherst Ballet, and they want to create a dance together. She is just worried about the final performance, “It will be really sad. I know I will be bawling right on stage.” Eliza, I don’t think you will be the only one with tears that night. We will all miss you, your positive attitude, warm smile and your whole class very much.



PHOTOGRAPH BY E. S. FAIR



PHOTOGRAPH BY E. S. FAIR

Seniors Eliza, Carolina and Hannah in Rainforest costumes

New Programs at Amherst Ballet

Winter Vacation Workshops: We are pleased to announce that based upon the success of our full day workshops for young dancers ages five through ten, we will be adding a new workshop for this age group during the week of the February school vacation (February 19-23). Watch for details in November!

Next summer will be filled with new and exciting opportunities to study dance at Amherst Ballet. Watch for materials in February and register dancers early to assure a place; we had a long waiting list for *The Firebird* this year!



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IMPORTANT DATES

FRI, DECEMBER 1 **CLASSES DO MEET** in spite of Amherst Schools' Curriculum Day
DECEMBER 12 - 18 **Visitors' week for Lower School, Tuesday-Monday**
SAT, DECEMBER 9 **No Level C classes. UPPER SCHOOL PRESENTATION 7:00pm**, Amherst Regional Middle School Auditorium.
LOWER SCHOOL AND PUBLIC INVITED
TUES, DECEMBER 19 **No classes.** Vacation begins
DECEMBER 19-21 **First Night rehearsals**
DECEMBER 29-30 **First Night rehearsals**
SUN, DECEMBER 31 **Performance at Northampton's First Night**
TUES, JANUARY 2 **Classes resume**
MON, JANUARY 15 **No classes.** Martin Luther King Day observance
MON, JANUARY 29 **CLASSES DO MEET** in spite of Amherst Schools' Teacher Workday
SAT, FEBRUARY 17 Vacation begins at 12:30pm after morning Lower School classes meet. **No Level C classes**
FEBRUARY 18- 25 **School Vacation.** Classes resume Monday February 26
MARCH 17 AND 18 **Amherst Ballet's Celebration of Dance, 30th Anniversary Performances**

PLEASE CHECK REHEARSAL BOARD FOR REHEARSAL SCHEDULES ESPECIALLY DURING VACATION WEEKS

PHOTOGRAPHS BY JEFF BANCAN



Dances from the Earth
 Spring 2006