BEHIND THE SCENES
a publication of the Board of Directors
AMIHERST BALLET
29 Strong Street Amherst, Massachusetts 01002 413.549.1555 info@amherstballet.org February 2008

From Your Director...

Catherine Fair

With the December Presentation of our Upper School students and Visitors' Day of our Lower School students behind us, it is time to think earnestly about our Spring Performances. This year's performances will take place on March 8 and 9 in Bowker Auditorium at the University of Massachusetts. We hope you will attend one of our performances in support of a specific dancer or all of Amherst Ballet more generally. A ticket order form is included in this newsletter; we hope you will use it!

There is always so much to do to create a performance. Of course there are the many hours of class and rehearsal for our students/performers and their teachers and choreographers. There are the arrangements to secure a theater, lighting designer and stage manager as well as the front-of-house details involving ticket sales, ushers and refreshments. While I make many of these arrangements personally, our board of directors and parent volunteers are also called upon to help. And that they do so willingly makes my job so much easier to accomplish.

And then there are the costumes. Amherst Ballet has always been known for its costumes. Since the days of our founder Therese B. Donohue's first ballets, Amherst Ballet's costumes have been out of the ordinary. This year is no exception and I am working with a wonderful group of parents with a remarkable can-do attitude. These parents have scoured our store of costumes for the basis of this season's costumes. I have shopped for fabric with these parents and spent time on-line pouring over ready-made costumes that can be customized to my specifications. These parents have done their own research and shown me designs and accessories to turn plain white tutus into little jewels and have also been assisted by the expertise and skill of faculty member Joanna Duncan who is also constructing a number of costumes. Our board of directors held a successful fundraiser specifically to raise fund for tutus. Several of our dancers performed at Northampton's First Night and the "AB Sewing Circle" worked over the holidays to have their costumes ready in time. (Perhaps you saw the photo from First Night of our three *Sleeping Beauty* Jewels in the Daily Hampshire Gazette in January?!?) Special thanks go to Margaret Arsenault, Joanna Duncan, Linda Ho, Kara Leistyna, Karen Schweitzer, Heidi Stemple and Kris Tyrrell for their hard work, good cheer and talents.

Our students love to perform. Knowing that, I was eager to accept the invitation to perform *Peter and the Wolf* with the Smith College Orchestra at the end of March. Fourteen of our students (mostly from the Lower School) will be performing along with Bob McGrath of *Sesame Street* fame. Again parents have rallied to my aid driving their children to extra rehearsals, creating props, sewing costumes, and finding additional venues in April at which we will perform this little gem. I hope to have additional information about these performances posted on our website as it becomes available.

Photo by Ethan Schweitzer-Gaslin

As always, Amherst Ballet is a busy place.

I thank you for your interest and hope you will continue to support our dancers and our mission.

*Relevé*Relevé

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Where are They Now?

News About Former AB Students & Staff

Ella Reily Stocker is now a senior at Bard College and sent us a postcard announcing the December performance of her Senior Project Choreography...**Rosalie Elkinton** is a student at Brown University and performs there with their modern company. She also has been performing with Son Flamenco a company directed by Ines Arrubla who appeared as the witch in *The Magician's Nephew*. Son Flamenco appeared at the Iron Horse in December and at First Night in Northampton...Former AB teacher and choreographer **Sam Kenney** is now an assistant professor of dance in SUNY Freedonia's Department of Theater and Dance...Former AB teacher **Jennifer Rockwell Edwards** danced with both The Metropolitan Ballet and Saint Paul's Chamber Ballet in the twin cities this fall. Husband and dance partner Ross Swartout Edwards has also resumed dancing in addition to being a graduate student in Political Science at the University of Minnesota. Good luck on that Ph.D. dissertation!...**Katie Huston**, who took some classes at AB while she was a student at UMass, was one of only 40 students in the country to be awarded a prestigious Marshall Scholarship. Congratulations!

The Young Dancer Scholarship Fund

The Young Dancer Scholarship Fund was established in 2001 by an Amherst Ballet Upper School dancer on the occasion of her Bat Mitzvah. In appreciation for the many years of joy she had attained from classes and performances, this dancer decided to donate a portion of her Bat Mitzvah gift money to enable other aspiring young dancers in our community to have the same opportunity. Since that time Amherst Ballet has received dozens of donations allocated for the Young Dancer Scholarship Fund, including a generous donation by another Upper School student who was also celebrating her Bat Mitzvah! Each year, scholarships from the Young Dancer Fund are awarded to Lower School students (aged 5 to 11) whose families may not be able to afford full tuition. The intent of this scholarship fund is that everyone should have the chance to dance!

Amherst Ballet welcomes donations to the Young Dancer Scholarship Fund in any amount.

It Takes A Village:

The Summer Reconstruction Project

Heidi Stemple

When I joined the board of directors of Amherst Ballet almost two years ago, there was talk about fixing up the upstairs dressing rooms and updating our director Catherine Fair's office. This summer, we finally did it!

An enormous amount of work was done to achieve the changes and the list of volunteers who pitched in (see below) is long. Many of you may not have an idea of what was really accomplished. When we started, the upstairs space was like a rabbit warren of small rooms containing two small dressing rooms and a costume closet. It was clear this year that our large Upper School student body would need more dressing space. And the bathtub filled with costumes in the upstairs bathroom – a throw back to when AB was someone's home – was taking up valuable room. The whole process reminds me of a book…

Prologue: Before any construction could even be done, the costume closet had to be emptied. Karen Schweitzer and I led a group of parents, dancers, and board members in moving all the costumes. This was quite a job, but we discovered a treasure trove of goodies in the process that you are sure to see on stage in the future. Many of the costumes were moved to storage high up in the downstairs dressing room and many were moved temporarily (I hope!!) to my home.

Chapter one, Demolition Day: Board Members Tom Dumm (President), Delcie Bean (Treasurer), Mitch Gaslin (Secretary), Jack Wileden, Office Manager Andrea Leibson, dancer Maddison Stemple-Piatt and I arrived with sledge hammers, crow bars, and an assortment of tools befitting a professional construction crew. With a swing of our President's hammer, we began the destruction that completely gutted the upstairs dressing room, left a hole in the bathroom floor and nearly flooded (don't ask) Mrs. Fair's office. During the day, we threw debris out the window, carried a cast iron tub down a flight of stairs, got bruised, dirty, and sweaty. The huge dumpster (donated by Dave Duseau) was filling rapidly. When we were done, we were exhausted and excited at what we had accomplished. We were proud. Then we surveyed the damage. Who was going to put AB back together? And, all before Mrs. Fair returned from vacation and the summer campers began to arrive?!? We were nervous…

Photo by Maddison Stemple-Piatt

Delcie Bean, Tom Dumm, Mitch Gaslin and Jack Wileden poised, victorious, over the bathtub.

Chapter two, Clean Up and Painting: With our demolition crew back for a second day, a handful of Diamonds (board Vice-President Robin, former AB dancer Jillian, and brother Spencer), and one professional contractor and AB dad Chris Loftfield, we finished filling the dumpster. With Chris taking on the jobs that required expertise, we started with the upstairs bathroom, laying a new bathroom floor. Wallpaper was stripped from walls and the painting began. Dancers, parents and Mrs. Fair volunteered in shifts and the formerly dingy space started looking lighter and more inviting.

Chapter three, Andrea, Heidi, and Maddison Go Shopping: In a day trip to Ikea in Connecticut, we managed to get everything we needed to fix up the dressing room. We almost had to leave Maddison behind because the van was completely full. Jack was in charge of building the wall units ("some assembly required") which hold the dance clothes for our 40-plus Upper School dancers. New light fixtures and insulating blinds were also installed in the new dressing room.

continued on page 6

Harvest Fete

Andrea Leibson

It was a beautiful night for our Fourth Annual Harvest Fete which took place on October 13, 2007. More than 150 people were in attendance – an increase of 50% over last year's Fete. Generous hosts Gillian and Jim Duda and a small army of board members, AB dancers and their parents worked to create the appropriate harvest-y ambiance. Delicious dinner was catered by Portabella Catering of Amherst and music for the evening was again provided by the ever-popular Johnny B and the Hornets who brought along a rockin' saxophonist. AB board president Tom Dumm said a few words to those in attendance and so did AB director Catherine Fair who then introduced AB dancers (Aliya Cycon, Jessie Duda, Marissa Ho, Camille Kemache, Bryar Loftfield, Olivia Riley, Ethan Schweitzer-Gaslin, Pilar Solomon-Jefferson and Kenna Tyrrell) who showed us something of their dancing talents and group camaraderie.

After the entertainment it was time for the not-so-silent part of the Silent Auction. State Representative Stan Rosenberg, a wonderful supporter of the arts in general and Amherst Ballet in particular, served as auctioneer. He cajoled, teased and worked the crowd into quite a bidding frenzy. Through his efforts and those of volunteers, we raised over $8000 on interesting auction items. The vacation home owners, artisans, institutions, restaurants and businesses who donated to the Silent Auction are listed below. Please patronize them, and when you do, thank them for their support of Amherst Ballet.

The Fetes have been the most successful fundraisers in AB's history and the 2007 Fete netted AB over $10,000. Each year these events have grown in attendance and increased funds to help AB meet its mission of dance education, performance and community enrichment. Such success must be repeated! If you would like to donate an item for next year's Fete and Silent Auction, please contact Andrea at AB and it will be included.

Photo by Kris Tyrrell

Amherst Books
Amherst Cinema
Amherst Coffee
Amherst Farmer's Supply
Andrew's Greenhouse
Annette Cycon
Blue Marble
Boyden & Perron
Crazy Noodles
Chez Albert
Christina Lindwall
Dan Feldman
David Farkas
David Moskin
D. Vincent Engel
Dean's Beans
Delcie Bean
Eastern Mountain Sports
Elements Hot Tubs
Emily Dickinson Museum
Eric Carle Museum of Picture Book Art
Exotic Pet & Fish World
FamilyFun Magazine
Fine Arts Center
Food for Thought Books
Four Seasons Liquors
Gillian Haven
Good Dirt Pottery
Hadley Picture Framing
Heidi Stemple
High Meadow Skin Care
Hill Construction
Interlink Books
Jack Wileden & Andrea Leibson
Jan Kelly
Jane Wald
Jane Yolen
Jay Pope
Jeanne Esposito
Jim & Gillian Duda
John Cooper
Joy Howard
Judy Smith
Karen Michaels
Laughing Dog Cyclery
Leigh Dunlap (Lost Tribe Arts)
Linda & Mark Bean
The Lord Jeff Inn
LJ Exposures

Photo by Kris Tyrrell

Mad Imports
Marilyn Robert
Marissa Hashizume
Meg England
Meg Vickery
Michaelson's Gallery
Monkey Bar
Monkey Business
Mullins Center
Nancy Howard
Nancy Huntley
Peter Shea
Pub Restaurant
Robin & Ted Diamond
Sam Morse
Scandihoovians
Stamell Strings
Tom Dumm
Valley Frame Works
Valley Veterinary Hospital
Valley ComputerWorks
Wanda & Jerzy Kokurewicz

It Takes A Village, continued from page 3

Chapter four, Parents add finishing touches: AB dad and Pathfinder High School teacher Jerry Costello constructed seven benches for the dressing room, observation area and new student lounge (though I have been told the dancers refuse to call it by that silly word). AB mom Sandy Littell returned to Ikea for comfy pillows and colorful pillow covers to make the space especially welcoming.

Chapter five, The Director's Office: Board member Dave Moskin assembled his own crew (friend Charlie and daughter May) to renovate Catherine Fair's office. Dave and crew painted the walls and cupboards a crisp white and installed new shelves and file cabinets. Now Mrs. Fair has enough space in her office to meet with others. And parent Jerry Costello installed new track lighting in the lobby so we can all see what we're doing when we're in there.

Chapter six, The Outside: In the brief hiatus when there were no summer camps going on, Barry Magnani and his crew removed and rebuilt the exterior wooden deck and stairs in the back of the building. Barry also replaced the front step too; you may notice its new coat of yellow courtesy of board member Peter Vickery.

Epilogue: We certainly hope that everyone enjoys the improvements to our building and we hope you take the opportunity to see them for yourselves. We thank everyone who helped in big ways and small. The AB community is always pitching in and the Board of Directors appreciates each one of you. We know our building, like any home, needs constant care and upgrading. We will continue to work hard to make it a home away from home for our dancers and their families. I know I spend as much time there as at my real house!

Photo by Amy Zuckerman

Level A dancers at the December 2007 Presentation Night.

Acknowledgements: Thanks go to Aravis Albert, Eliza Arsenault, Delcie Bean, Jerry Costello, The Diamonds (Robin, Jillian, Spencer and Ted), Tom Dumm and Irene and Jim Bright-Dumm, Dave Duseau, Maria and Gabrielle Engel, Catherine Fair, Mitch Gaslin, Jennifer Hodgkins, LiLi Johnson, Andrea Leibson, Sandy Littell, Chris Loftfield, Barry Magnani and his crew, Dave and Mae Moskin and friend Charlie, Karen Schweitzer and Ethan Schweitzer-Gaslin, Peter Shea, Heidi Stemple and Maddison Stemple-Piatt, Peter Vickery, Jack and Alex Wileden

Heidi Stemple is an AB mom, author of 14 books and a frequent contributor to the AB newsletter.

LiLi Johnson

an accelerated dancer

Heidi Stemple

When you watch LiLi Johnson dance, it is difficult to believe that she only put on her first pair of ballet slippers at age 13! But it's true, that's when she started dancing at AB. To be fair, she did take a Chinese Dance class with AB founder Mrs. Donahue when she was little—an experience she only vaguely remembers. Mrs. Donahue encouraged her to take a ballet class at the time, but LiLi was uninterested. It wasn't until years later that she regretted not giving ballet a try and she signed up for a teen beginner class. She wasn't a beginner for long.

LiLi jumped into ballet the way this self-proclaimed over-achiever jumps into everything—with both feet. According to AB's Artistic Director Catherine Fair, LiLi is an excellent student with natural talent who takes in every detail given by her teachers. Mrs. Fair continued, "It is an absolute pleasure to teach her." This past summer, LiLi attended both the American Academy of Ballet summer program at SUNY Purchase and the Joffrey Ballet summer camp with 15 other AB dancers. Both strengthened her rapidly improving ballet technique.

But it's not just technique that ballet has given LiLi. One thing she likes about AB is that she has made friends of different ages and from different schools—people she probably wouldn't have otherwise met. She enjoys a peer group that spans all the ages and levels of AB dancers. In New York City, during the Joffrey trip, she was both a role model and den mother of sorts for the younger dancers.

LiLi also sees dance class as a great place to let go of a stressful day. Somewhere, she says, to be able to "get out of my head and just think about the dancing." And with a full academic load as a senior at Amherst Regional High School — including two languages (Chinese and French) — LiLi has a lot of stressful days.

In order to achieve her goal of becoming a cardiothoracic surgeon, LiLi plans to study pre-med perhaps with double majors in math and dance. But, first, she has a big year with AB. Because of her late start, she has not been on stage much (two years as a village elder in *The Arctic* and last year's *Hungarian Festival of Dance* corps). This year, though, she will be in the spotlight quite a bit with roles in both the *Five Elements* modern piece as "Wood" and in *Sleeping Beauty* as the "Ruby" jewel. Catherine Fair has this to say about LiLi: "though she came to ballet relatively late, as a high-school freshman, her work ethic, teachable nature, and natural talent have enabled her to catch up to her peer group, join Level C, and even earn a role as a jewel in the *Sleeping Beauty* Pas de Quatre."

Photo by Catherine Fair

LiLi is, in her own words, "so, so, so, so excited."

When you ask her about dance, LiLi will tell you "I'm not a dancer, I just love dancing." But watching her, we know that she is indeed, a dancer. Lucky for us, it is at AB that she loves dancing.

Mariel Adams

Annette Cycon

It is not stretching the truth to say that Mariel Adams has probably been dancing since before she was born. Her mother is a dancer and her father a musician, so she was immersed in music and dance from day one. Since then, Mari's passion, curiosity and skill for dance have led her to accumulate a wide variety of dance styles including ballet, modern, swing, lindy hop, salsa, latin, tango and contra dancing!

A "very, very energetic child," Mari, danced and bounced and performed at home before she took formal dance lessons. She joined Amherst Ballet for one year when she was nine years old. Then while accompanying her mother to swing dances, she began to pick up what eventually has become her favorite and most extensive dance form - swing dance. In fact she came back to ballet in order to improve her swing technique!

Mariel returned to Amherst Ballet in 8th grade and rediscovered a love for ballet. "Ballet is so beautiful and graceful. It gave me better balance, poise, strength and technique that I took to all my other dance forms." She started in Level 5 and moved quickly into the Upper School. In her first year, Mari performed in *Shim Chung* as an eel and as coral and in *Swan Lake* as a Polish dancer. Besides ballet and swing, she also loves modern dance. "Modern gives me the chance to express myself. It's more innovative and free, and I love that." She combined her ballet and modern training in two performances of *The Arctic*, first as the Mama Polar Bear, and last year as the tender and high-flying Mama Wolf. Anyone who has ever seen Mari on stage can see that she loves being there and that joy radiates from her as she dances.

Mari's stage experience extends far beyond dance and Amherst Ballet. She performed in her first musical theater when she was only seven years old at a performing arts summer camp production of *Fiddler on the Roof*. She went on to perform every summer there until she was 12. Back at home; she landed the role of Bielke - the youngest daughter in the Amherst Leisure Services' production of Fiddler. She performed for LSSE several times, then went on to perform in every musical offered at Amherst Regional High School, where she is now a senior. She even choreographed for them in *Urinetown* and *Cats!* This year she will perform in their production of *Aida*. If that were not enough, she also sings with the Chorale, an audition-singing group at the high school.

Academically, Mariel takes honors classes and is applying to colleges to study psychology and film. Oh yes, she also loves film, and in fact made the first documentary ever about Amherst Ballet, shown to critical acclaim at the Amherst Ballet holiday sleepover in December.

Although Mariel is a member of many performing communities, Amherst Ballet holds a special place in her heart. "Amherst Ballet keeps me going. Sometimes I lose determination and motivation, but the consistency and support at Amherst Ballet refreshes my adrenalin. The atmosphere is welcoming, friendly and encouraging. We are not competitive, but determined to be our best. I am there because I want to be there. It makes me happy to be there." She speaks about the new student board also with pride. "It makes me feel good to help younger students. I remember what it was like coming in 8th grade and I want to help them to feel more comfortable. I like being a mentor to younger students." She adds, "Dance has helped me be more confident, outgoing and comfortable, (and) having a supportive dance community makes you more self-supporting."

In this year's performance, Mariel will perform in two roles that reflect her personal style as a dancer (minus swing.) It will be a pleasure to watch her in the *Latin Piece* and the modern, *Space Oddity*.

Good luck Mariel, in all your future performances on stage singing, dancing and acting, and off stage behind the cameras. We will miss your infectious smile, powerful leaps and warm, positive attitude.

Photo by Catherine Fair

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Calendar of Upcoming Events at AB

FEBRUARY 18- 24	School Vacation. Classes resume Monday February 25
MARCH 8 & 9	SPRING REPERTOIRE PERFORMANCES
MARCH 29	Peter & the Wolf performed at John M. Greene Concert Hall
SAT, APRIL 19	Vacation begins at 12:30 after morning Lower School classes.
No Level C classes	
APRIL 21 – 27	School Vacation. Classes resume April 28
MON, MAY 26	No Classes. Memorial Day