

Ballet: 3-year-olds' first steps

Continued from C1

which is tapping to "Let Me Entertain You," so Frances calls them over to the stereo to listen to the song before they dance to it. There are 12 girls now, and when they run over it sounds like the first minutes of a particularly nifty sale in the bedding department at Bloomingdale's.

After several run-throughs of the piece, Frances says, "Bravo, dahlings, you were fabulous! Shall we go put our ballet shoes on?"

"Yes!"

And the girls hoof it to the door like a drove of steer, returning a few minutes later in pink ballet slippers, quiet as a mischief of mice.

Frances, who is from Wayne, has taught dance for 42 years. She is petite and lithe and 60 years old and still loves to teach, she says. Frances manages to maintain order among the kids without being strict. Her approach with little kids is to make it fun and encourage their creativity so they'll develop a passion for dance. Her assistant is Christan O'Neill, 23, who started dancing with Frances at age 3 and now works for her full time.

Lyndsay, dressed in a velveteen flowered leotard and pink velveteen tutu, is bouncy today, and during the tap portion it is hard for her to keep still. She taps in place, swings her arms, turns to her left, taps in place.

Frances lets her move during the lulls, but gets her attention

when the group practices.

"You've got heebie-jeebies," she tells Lyndsay.

"I know," the child answers.

But now, ballet. The group starts with chassées, in which they are supposed to glide along the floor in a straight line, one foot leading, the other following.

As they line up by the barre, Frances says, "Remember to put your special ending on! Ta-da!" And she demonstrates, making an "O" shape over her head. "You always put an ending on, right? A book has an ending, a movie has an ending, and our chassées have an ending. Put your chins up and smile! Woilà!"

It's Paula's turn, and she flits across the room. Then it's Ashley, who looks like a butterfly. Some of the girls forget their special endings; others move slowly and deliberately, as if they're getting a glass of water in the middle of the night. Some skip. Others hold O'Neill's hand. Some move at an angle rather than a straight line. One girl walks across at a lean, as if being pulled by an invisible chord attached to her shoulders.

The class contains a Cinderella portion, in which courtly medieval love seems to be alive and well. The girls pretend to don crowns, gloves, glass slippers, bracelets and earrings, turn out their toes into first position, move their invisible wands about, point their right arm up and then échappé, which here

The class bounces around the room to symbolize flying away. Four of the girls decide they don't want to stop flying away, and continue well after the class has sat down against the wall.

looks more or less like the bottom half of a jumping jack.

"Here comes the prince! Show him your slipper! Close first, throw a kiss and fly away," Frances calls out in a fairy tale voice.

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At the end, Frances hands the class scarves and lets them to move to music.

"Remember, be beautiful! Do your own little dance," she tells them.

And they do, swirling here and there, standing still, trotting around. Jovanna throws her red scarf in the air and keeps dancing



KEVIN R. WEXLER/Herald News

Gloria Frances, in black, teaches a step to Olivia Monaco, standing left, and Jovanna Russo.

after everyone else has stopped.

"You doing a little solo today?" Frances asks her. Jovanna continues dancing. "Go ahead!" Frances says.

With a, "You were fabulous, dahlings!" the class is almost over.

But not quite. O'Neill hands out bags of candy. It is Valentine's Day, after all, what Frances has called during class a "very special day."

The dancers are finished for the day, and they go to the door on slippered feet, with the only sound

in the room the rattling of candy and the occasional, "Mommy!"

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Hair: History of black styles

Continued from C1

1979: Braids and beads cross the color line when Bo Derek appears with cornrows in the movie "10."

1980: Model-actress Grace Jones sports her trademark flat top fade.

1988: Spike Lee exposes the good hair/bad hair, light-skinned/dark-skinned schism in black America in his movie "School Daze."

1990: "Sisters love the weave," Essence magazine declares. A variety of natural styles and locks also become more accepted.

1997: Singer Erykah Badu poses on the cover of her debut album "Baduizm" with her head wrapped, ushering in an eclectic brand of Afrocentrism.

1998: Carson Inc., creator of Dark & Lovely and Magic Shave

for black men, acquires black-owned beauty company Johnson Products of Chicago in 1998. L'Oreal purchases Carson two years later and merges it with Soft Sheen.

1999: People magazine names lock-topped Grammy award-winning artist Lauryn Hill one of its 50 Most Beautiful People.

2001: Rapper Lil' Kim wears a platinum blonde weave, while

singer Macy Gray sports a new school Afro. Some black women perm, some press, others go with natural twists, braids and locks.

2006: Black hair care is a billion-dollar industry.

Sources: "Hair Story: Untangling the Roots of Black Hair in America," by Ayana D. Byrd and Lori L. Tharps; Nicole Volta Avery, Detroit Free Press

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