

SPECIAL BUSINESS ISSUE

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JUNE 2001

## DYNAMIC DUOS

The Secrets Of Teaching Adagio

## THE INS AND OUTS OF RENTING YOUR STUDIO

## ENCOURAGING STUDENTS' SELF-EXPRESSION

## ARE YOU READY

To Start Your Own Studio?

# SUSAN MCGUIRE

TAKES THE LEAD AT THE PAUL TAYLOR SCHOOL

WESTCHESTER'S DANCE MAN  
Joe Antony Cavise

For Printing Only

by Susie Eisner Eley

CAVISE WITH DAUGHTERS IN A  
STUDIO PORTRAIT

COURTESY OF RICHARD HUTCHINGS PHOTO

In 1987 Joe Antony Cavise was a 29-year-old dancer at the top of his game. He was in his fourth year of *Cats* on Broadway, dancing the lead role of Mr. Mistoffelees. And then one day, he just quit. "Everyone was shocked when I left," he recalls. "They asked me if I was leaving to do another gig but I said, 'No, I'm going to start my own dance school.'" With a résumé that included stints in the movie *A Chorus Line* as well as national tours of *Guys and Dolls*, *The Threepenny Opera* and *South Pacific*, Cavise decided it was time to move on.

# westchester's dance

Leaving the Great White Way was simply the next step on a professional road map that Cavise had mentally sketched during his undergraduate years at Clark University in Massachusetts. He left Clark in 1980 with a business degree, a BS in economics and a determination to carry out his business plan of opening a dance school. "Everything I did leading up to opening Dance Cavise was done to gain the knowledge and experience I would need to run a business. I've always wanted to teach more than perform."

Cavise began studying dance at the age of 9 in his hometown of Syracuse, New York, after his mother dropped him off at ballet class with his two sisters. "My sisters went

administrators, 26 teachers, 650 students and the junior and senior companies of Off Center Dance Theatre (OCDT). Dance Cavise is the bread and butter that pays the bills and helps fund OCDT, a not-for-profit organization. The school offers classes in musical theater, jazz, ballet, modern, tap, hip hop and ballroom.

"Originally, I had no intention of opening a studio where I'd have to compete with New York City," says Cavise. "At first I thought I'd rather be in a place that was dance deficient, like the Catskills or northern New York." Ironically, his geographical choice has helped his business to grow. "We're a half an hour outside the city and right across the street from the train station. I have the best teachers from New York come in and sometimes teach three or four classes a day."

OCDT's senior company, made up of 10 women, is the only professional dance company in town. "I started OCDT in 1991 because I missed being around professional dancers and in theaters," admits Cavise. "I also wanted to offer professional dance to Westchester, which it didn't have." Dancers are selected through an annual audition in the fall and are paid for rehearsals, expenses and performances. The company presents classical and contemporary works by Cavise and other choreographers at The Performing Arts Center at SUNY Purchase and in small theaters throughout Manhattan.

Cavise's search for the next professional challenge led him to establish OCDT Youth Ensemble in 1993. "I never had any intention that the youth ensemble would become philanthropic. My aim was that it would be an educational enterprise with the senior members mentoring the junior ones," says Cavise. "But with conflicting work and school schedules, the two companies were not able to work together and the role of the junior company changed.

"In my effort to give the little ones as much performing experience as possible, I booked shows wherever I could," he says. With each performance Cavise discovered what a powerful tool dance could be for bringing children of all walks of life together. Today there are 20 youth ensemble members, from fourth grade and up, selected by an



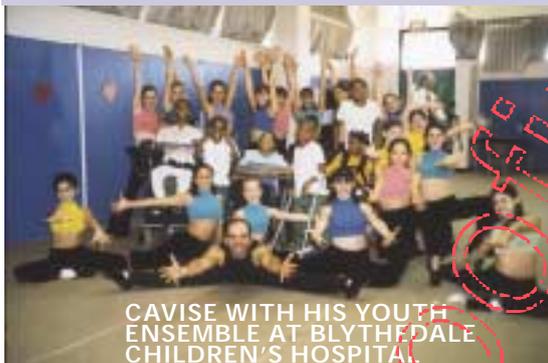
COURTESY OF JOE CAVISE

CAVISE IN REHEARSAL WITH OCDT

annual audition. Cavise trains the Youth Ensemble to present motivational workshops in places like the Ronald McDonald House for children with cancer, the Blythedale House for trauma victims, schools, hospitals, theaters, community centers and museums, to kids who are often very sick or mentally handicapped. The philanthropic work of OCDT has made it one of the most innovative junior companies on the East Coast.

"Most of the junior company kids are affluent and privileged. They may never have seen an amputee or a kid without hair going through cancer treatments," explains Cavise. "It's quite enlightening for them to watch a boy without legs dancing. I have seen my kids go from being fearful to exchanging letters and photos with the kids and even having play dates."

The workshops are built on audience participation, geared appropriately for each



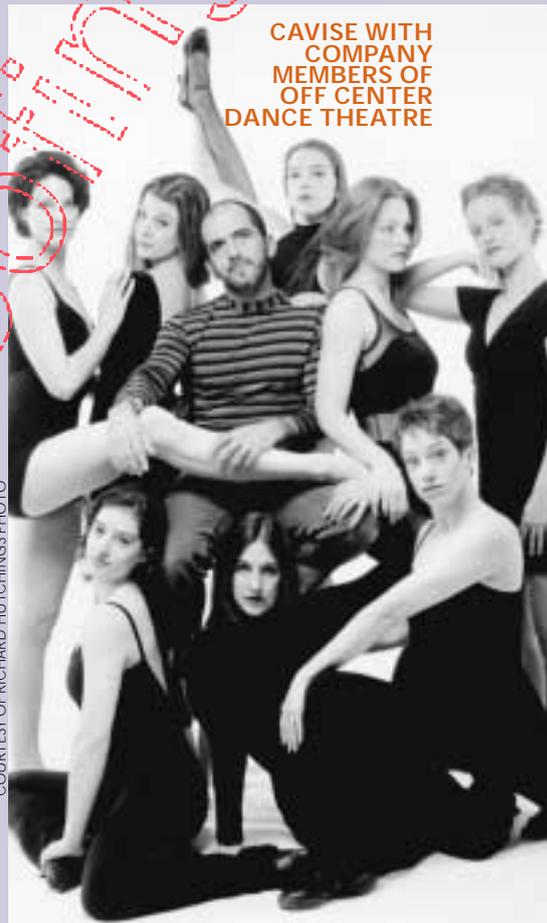
CAVISE WITH HIS YOUTH ENSEMBLE AT BLYTHEDALE CHILDREN'S HOSPITAL

COURTESY OF JOE CAVISE

on to other activities, but I was hooked right away," he explains. Cavise continued taking dance classes through high school and at Clark, before moving to Chicago on a full scholarship with Gus Giordano, whose company he joined in the early '80s. "Gus gave me the foundation for my career," says Cavise. "He was everything I wanted to be."

Cavise's dance empire, located in the New York City suburb of Mamaroneck, includes Dance Cavise, a thriving school with six

**With a school and two dance companies in Mamaroneck, New York, dancer, teacher and choreographer Joe Cavise grows a dance business one step at a time.**



COURTESY OF RICHARD HUTCHINGS PHOTO

CAVISE WITH COMPANY MEMBERS OF OFF CENTER DANCE THEATRE

# man

## How to Market An Outreach Program For A Junior Company

You have a talented junior company with a dazzling repertory and the best intentions for an outreach program. Joe Cavise offers the following advice for getting it up and running.

1. Develop a press kit to promote your junior company. It should include information about the dancers and the repertory, bios of the directors, press clippings, recommendations and photos. Have an adequate supply of kits available at all times.
2. Identify organizations in your community that would be interested in hosting a dance performance, a workshop or an outreach event. Think creatively. Contact local hospitals, rehabilitation centers, senior citizen facilities, community centers, libraries, prisons and schools. Contact national organizations, like UNICEF or the Ronald McDonald House, that have local branches in your region.
3. Comb through your school's student registration cards to identify parents who work for companies—not-for-profit or for-profit—and who might be interested in participating in an outreach event. Then ask those parents to introduce you to the relevant individuals.
4. If budget allows, hire a marketing person. If not, identify someone on your staff or board with excellent interpersonal skills and a great phone manner to start calling all the organizations on the list.
5. After a show, ask the coordinator or director of the host organization for a recommendation to add to your press kit. Inquire if they have colleagues who might be interested in working with you.

venue. Cavise's favorite word is "try," a concept he uses to get often reluctant audiences to dance. But he also realizes that "try" doesn't work in every situation. "Before we visited Blythedale's amputee trauma victims, I met with the director, who wanted to know what approach I planned to take. I knew 'try' wouldn't work with them because they can't do what other kids can do," says Cavise. "Instead, we told the kids how each



one of them is as unique and beautiful as a snowflake and encouraged them to dance from their heart." It's this rare ability to read an audience that distinguishes Cavise and OCDT's outreach program.

OCDT has an ongoing program with HELP-USA, the country's largest provider for public housing and social services. Dance Cavise teachers instruct at HELP in Brooklyn once a month, and three times a month HELP kids are brought to Dance Cavise for a workshop, culminating in an annual performance.

One of Cavise's greatest challenges was his visit last year to the women's prison of the Bedford Hills Correctional Facility in New York, where he had been invited to host a dance party for mothers in the prison and their children. Cavise left the company behind and went just with a co-teacher. "I was terrified at first. I had to go through three iron gates and a metal detector. The women were led into the room in handcuffs and then released before their children were brought in." Toddlers to teenagers quickly filled the room. Cavise's job was to get the mothers and their children communicating. "I brought music that I knew the kids listened to. We lined them up in front of their moms and I said, 'Show me what you know, and I'll show you what I know.' At first no one moved, so I started dancing, making a fool of myself, and hoping they would jump in and correct me. They came forward,

laughing at me, saying, 'No, no. Here's how it's done.'" The prison party was an enormous success, and Cavise has been invited back.

Running as active an outreach program as Cavise requires tremendous time and energy spent organizing, administering and fundraising, with little financial rewards. Private contributions, corporate sponsorship and the Westchester Arts Council fund OCDT. "The outreach programs are incredibly rewarding. I'm on a huge high afterward, which makes it all worth it," he says.

When asked if he ever feels he's bitten off more than he can chew, Cavise laughs and admits that he often feels overwhelmed juggling business and family. But in that laugh is the sense that he wouldn't have it any other way. Cavise always throws himself into his work, keeping an eye on the next endeavor.

He's now busy growing a satellite studio in Bedford, NY, that will offer daily classes starting in September (it currently offers classes once a week). He's also reviving Cavise Talent Management, a business he began several years ago to connect talented dancers with agencies in NYC. Cavise has never been one to rest on his laurels. And there have been many to rest on. DT

*For more info on OCDT, call Dance Cavise at 914-381-5222, or log onto the website at: [www.dancecavise.com](http://www.dancecavise.com).*