

ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT

By ROBERTA HERSHENSON

MAMARONECK

REBECCA ERDE is known for dancing through the halls of Heathcote Elementary School in Scarsdale, where she is a fifth grader. At 11, she is an eight-year veteran of private dance lessons and looks up to leading ballerinas the way some others her age get giddy over pop idols. "It's kind of my special thing," Rebecca said. "I dance so much in my school that they get annoyed."

But Rebecca fits right in at Dance Cavise in Mamaroneck, where she takes two ballet and two jazz dance classes a week. With her red hair pulled back in a bun, wearing a maroon leotard, pink tights and ballet slippers, she matches the other students in concentration. One recent afternoon, the teacher, Olimpia Hernandez, demonstrated how to achieve good balance, or good "turnout" in the language of ballet. "You have to be able to hold a glass of water on your heel," Ms. Hernandez said, as the students imitated the position. Sunlight and classical music filled the room, lending the studio a timeless feel; Degas would have felt right at home.

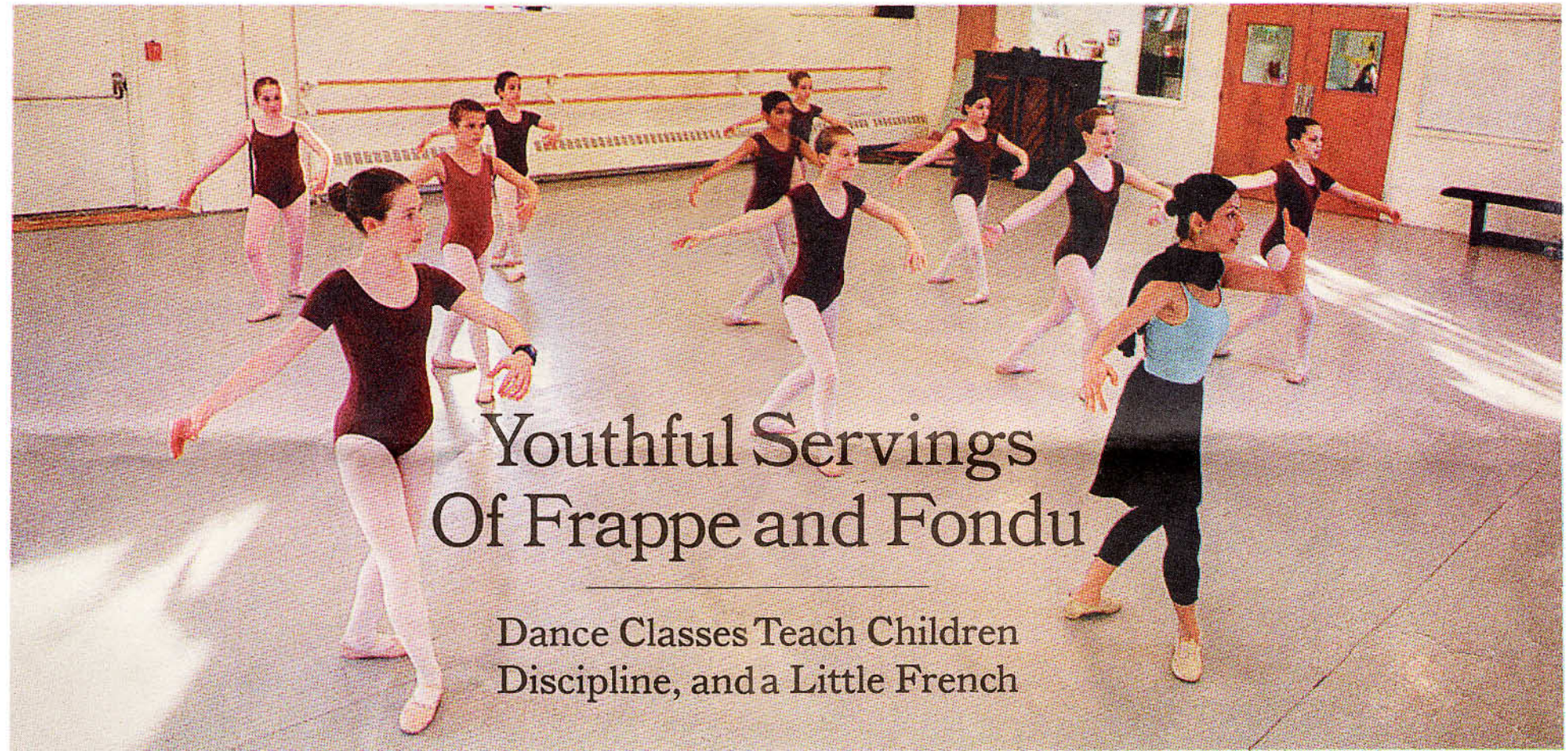
An hour later, the students - their hair loose and their feet bare - were dancing to a modern jungle beat in a jazz dance class taught by Joe Anthony Cavise, the school's co-founder and director. Like many dance instructors in Westchester, a county rich in year-round dance opportunities for children and teenagers, Mr. Cavise makes ballet the cornerstone of all other dance forms. "They love jazz and modern, but they understand that you can only get so far in my world without ballet," said Mr. Cavise, who danced on Broadway for five years in "Cats," including a stint as the leading character, Mr. Mistoffelees. "My jazz is based on classical training."

A child who just wants to cut loose to the music may find less formal classes at a local community center, but Westchester's major dance schools take their education missions to heart, whether the focus is on modern dance, jazz, tap, Broadway dancing or ballet.

"We have a reputation for being structured and strict, but everything we do has a meaning," said Diane Clark, the preschool director and student affairs coordinator at the Westchester Theater Dance Academy in Bedford Hills, which was started in the 1960's by two former Rockettes, who still run the school. "We believe that students should be lovingly disciplined. Dance is a disciplined art."

The discipline extends to the language of dance, which is mostly French. At Dance Cavise, 3-year olds may get to "walk like a dancer on your tippy-toes," Mr. Cavise says, but by age 5 they know that "frappe" is a dance step, not a frothy drink, that "fondu" is a dance position, not a melted cheese dish, and that "attitude" is the French word for pose, not spunky behavior.

Mr. Cavise, who also takes dance to



Youthful Servings Of Frappe and Fondu

Dance Classes Teach Children Discipline, and a Little French

Roberta Hershenson for The New York Times

Students attend a ballet class at Dance Cavise in Mamaroneck. Westchester County is rich in year-round dance opportunities for children and teenagers.

schoolchildren with performances by his professional group, the Off Center Dance Theater, insists that all students in the school use the time-honored dance lingo. "As a creative art, unlike math and science, dance is supposed to be fun," he said. "But it can't be fun at the expense of proper learning."

Dance classes in Westchester cost up to \$600 a year for one lesson a week during the school months, with extra costs for the appropriate shoes and, sometimes, costumes. Some schools pay for costumes, and offer scholarships for those who cannot afford the fees. Dance directors say that the benefits can be measured in more than children's enjoyment, or in the pride parents feel when a child blossoms on stage. For one thing, dance is exercise, they say.

"It's physical activity, and most of our children are woefully underserved in that area," said Judith G. Ross, a spokeswoman for the Steffi Nossen School of Dance in White Plains, which specializes in modern dance. "It's a way of using your body to express creativity. It helps develop a good body image." The school also offers ballet "for alignment purposes and for muscular development," Ms. Ross said, referring to the underpinnings of good dance form.

At the Tappan Zee Dance Group in Tarrytown, where modern and jazz classes are

Good exercise, and
something to put on
college applications.

also rooted in ballet technique, Jane Alexandre, the school's founder and director, wants children to know not only how to perform, but also how performances are put together. At rehearsals, students learn about stage lighting, sound cues and the role of the stage manager.

Immersion in dance also looks good on a college application, said Jayne Viltz, the director of the Dance School of the J.C.C. of Mid-Westchester in Scarsdale, where ballet is emphasized and advanced students are offered "partnering" workshops with young male professional dancers.

"Dance helps students get into college," Ms. Viltz said. "The discipline of being committed to something five or six times a week shows a sense of dedication, which is always very positive."

Girls are usually the overwhelming majority in dance classes, but boys also study

dance in Westchester. "We matriculate them with the girls," Mr. Cavise said. "By middle school they go into tap or hip-hop, which is nonballet based."

Children and teenagers who want to dance this summer have a wide variety of choices. Dance Cavise will offer seven-week workshops in dance and theater from June 28 through Aug. 12. The Tappan Zee Dance Group will offer workshops at several age levels beginning June 28. The Logrea Dance Academy in Ossining, the school of the Westchester Ballet Company, will hold classes from July 5 through Aug. 5. Scarsdale Ballet Studio in Scarsdale will offer workshops for children from June 28 through July 30, while the J.C.C. of Mid-Westchester will offer both ballet and ballroom dancing for teenagers from June 28 through Aug. 13 (younger children can also learn to dance at the J.C.C.'s summer arts camp).

Steffi Nossen will run a program in wheelchair dance from June 21 through June 26 as well as a dance camp and "story ballet" class from June 28 through Aug. 5. Youth Theater Interactions, a performing arts school and repertory company in Yonkers, will offer African and Haitian dance, ballet, tap and hip-hop classes from July 7 through Aug. 20. The Scene Stealers, a new community theater group based in North Salem,

will teach children the theatrical production process - including dance - the first three weeks of July.

Irish step dancing will be taught at the Yonkers-based Margaret Pike School of Dance starting June 28. The O'Rourke Academy of Irish Dance in White Plains offers step dance classes during the school year. Tap Kids in Tarrytown, a division of New York Stage Originals, will hold its annual summer program for nationally selected children ages 9 through 19 from July 18 through 24.

Mindful that children are not only the dancers of tomorrow but also the audiences of tomorrow, many dance organizations design performances especially for children. The Corner Store Dance Company, directed by Pam Finney, who teaches at the Modern Dance Center of Westchester in Bronxville, will give a free performance, "Step Right Up," for children ages 3 through 9 on June 26 at 3 p.m. at the North White Plains Library.

The Chamber Dance Project, founded by Diane Coburn Bruning of Sleepy Hollow, will hold a student performance on June 4 at the Tarrytown Music Hall. And the White Plains-based Grupo Folclorico Nuevo Mile-nio, which offers Latin American folk dancing classes for children and adults during the school year, will perform this summer at the Kensico Dam.

As the Show Ends, One Who Danced In 'Cats' Looks Back

By CHUCK SLATER

MAMARONECK
JOE ANTONY CAVISE, who has danced the dances, is not surprised that "Cats" is closing in June. He's surprised it's still running.

"When I left, I gave it a year," said Mr. Cavise, who performed in the show from 1983 to 1987. "Don't get me wrong, the show is great, but it's so expensive and SO incredibly difficult, so demanding physically. I never, ever dreamed it would run this long."

Mr. Cavise, a Pound Ridge resident who runs the Dance Cavise studio here, tried out for the show in December 1983, just after it completed its first year. "It was already replacing 'Chorus Line' as the show

'Now and Forever'? 'I never dreamed it would run this long.'

every dancer wanted to be in," he said between phone calls at the studio. (Incidentally, he is in the movie version of "A Chorus Line.") "Not many made it on the first audition, but I did."

And he took on the double role of Coricopat and Mungojerrie, two of the cats that dance through life's vagaries in "Cats," Andrew Lloyd Webber's musical adaptation of "Old Possum's Book of Practical Cats" by T. S. Eliot.

Of the 2 hours and 30 minutes that the show runs, Mr. Cavise was on stage for 2 hours and 15 minutes.

"It was so challenging physically," he said. "I had to climb the theater wall to the balcony every night as Mungojerrie, then I balanced from the edge of the balcony - about the width of a balance beam in gymnastics - every night. It had the audience oohing."

He was rewarded for his risk.

"The Equity pay was \$790 a week then," the dancer said. "I got \$20 extra as hazard pay."

Even practices could be hazardous. "The dances were so demanding that we practiced all the time, hours at a time," Mr. Cavise said. "We were aching and exhausted. Everyone had some problem physically. It made for a very close company: misery loves company."

"I pride myself on being one of the few who never missed a performance. My girlfriend, now my wife," he said of the dancer Lori Biscardi, "used to say, 'Can't you at least have Thanksgiving with us?' But I never did. I also think I'm one of the few who left the show while totally healthy."

From the beginning, Mr. Cavise was the understudy for the leading role of Mistoffelees. By the time he left the show, he was a semi-regular in the lead, performing the role up to a month at a time.

But nothing matched the emotion of the first time.

"I was absolutely terrified," he said.

"In the first act, the actor playing Mistoffelees, I think it was Herman Sebek, got injured," Mr. Cavise explained. "So I had to takeover for the second act, which opened with Mistoffelees entering by being lowered 50 feet down a rope."

"I had rehearsed the part plenty of times but never with the floodlights on, and I was totally blinded. All the lights in my face, it was like looking into five suns, and I had to do 36 consecutive spins."

"I started too close to the front of the stage and kept spinning closer - I didn't know where I was. I ended up almost falling off the stage. The other cast members later told me they were holding their breath and wondering in whose lap I would end up."

Now he can laugh. " 'Cats' gave me so much besides a job," Mr. Cavise said. "It put me on top of the dancing world. It opened a lot of doors."

While in the show, he was also hired to do "Backstage on Broadway," bringing the theater to youngsters, and vice-versa, and confirming what he wanted for his life's work.

"I wanted to be a positive influence with kids," said Mr. Cavise, who



Susan Farley for The New York Times

Joe Antony Cavise of Dance Cavise in his Mamaroneck studio. Mr. Cavise, center, as a member of "Cats" in 1986 with Jamie Patterson, left, and J. Poindexter. The show, he said, "put me on top of the dancing world."



did graduate work in dance education at New York University while in "Cats." "And I knew I was going to marry my wife, even if Lori didn't yet. Plus I'm a motivational type. I have so much energy."

Indeed, he gives the impression of constant motion even when sitting almost still and talking.

So he left "Cats" "to work with kids."

Dance Cavise is actually three different organizations in one. There

are the lessons given by a staff of professional dancers at the studio here. There is Cavise Talent Management, which sends promising youngsters to dance auditions - "We've placed four girls in 'Annie,'" Mr. Cavise said.

And there is Off Center Dance Theater, a nonprofit organization that spreads the message of dance through performing senior and junior troupes. Cavise, 42, still dances with Off Center Dance Theater.

Paramount in the whole troika to Mr. Cavise is the outreach program in which junior troupe members mentor and dance with youngsters from public housing. Once a month the youngsters, age 10 to 17, travel to East New York in Brooklyn to work with youths from the Genesis Homes. Once a month, the Genesis Homes youngsters are bused up to Mamaroneck to use the Cavise Studio.

"It's more about self-esteem and positive experiences than dancing," Mr. Cavise said. "You have to reach the kids. When I deal with the boys, I may say, 'A layup is a soté.' When I go to pat a youngster on the shoulder for a job well done, they often flinch the first time."

Mr. Cavise, who has worked with children at the Ronald McDonald House and Columbia Presbyterian Hospital in Manhattan, has also taught dancing at Pound Ridge Elementary School in his hometown.

"As part of the school's 60th anniversary celebration," he said, "we have a Dance to the Decades. Imagine getting 300 kids on a stage."

But wherever he is dancing or teaching, the subject often turns to "Cats," which opened in 1982 at the Winter Garden Theater and has been there ever since.

"I've been back twice," Mr. Cavise said. "For a 'Now and Forever' party on the ninth anniversary, Oct. 7, 1991, and for the record-breaking performance No. 6,138 on June 19, 1997. I hope there's a last reunion before they close."

Even if there is not, Mr. Cavise plans to be at the theater at least once before "Cats" has its 7,397th and final Broadway staging on June 25. "Fiona is 5 and Phoebe is 3," he said, beaming as he talked of his daughters. "I've got to take them to see 'Cats.'"

By DAN MARKOWITZ

MAMARONECK

The person who coined the saying, "Those who can, do; those who can't, teach," did not know Joe Cavise. The former Broadway dancer who performed in "Cats" and the movie version of "A Chorus Line," has for the last seven years been the co-owner with his wife, Lori, of Dance Cavise, a studio here.

In addition to teaching classes in ballet, modern, jazz, tap, hip hop and

Fluid motion
at Dance Cavise,
right.

Below: Bret
Fox and Dina
Giordana.



down the sidewalk."

A soccer player and runner at Horn mocks Junior High School here, Peter said: "Dancing is much harder than playing sports because when you're on a team, a lot of the time you're running up and down the field and either you have the ball or someone else does, but you're not in sync with them. In dance, everyone has to be together. You have to know what everyone else is doing. It takes total thought, endurance, and it's great exercise."

Boys at school will sometimes chide him by saying, "Go take a ballet class," Peter said. Actually, jazz is his dance form, but he admits that most people, when they think about dance, think of "ballet, tutus and Swan Lake." He said he is inspired by Mr. Cavise and such great male dancers as Mikhail Baryshnikov.

"Right now, it's a wonderful thing to do," Peter said. "Joe is energetic all the time. I'm really happy I've been able to dance with him. He makes me feel stronger. I don't expect to go all the way to Broadway. If I did, that would be marvelous."

At 11, Mr. Cavise quit dancing and did not return to it until he was 13. He attributed the interruption to the pressure of puberty. "I try to tell the boys that dance can be macho," he said. "Some boys think that dance is threatening to their masculinity. But you can dance and be a better athlete than some sportsman. And I think that keeps them going." Mr. Cavise teaches a beginning class for boys.

The passion in Mr. Cavise's eyes when he talks about dance and in

A group of dance students at Dance Cavise studio in Mamaroneck.

Photographs by Susan Farley for The New York Times

ballroom, Dance Cavise offers fitness and stretch classes for adults and a creative-movement class for small children.

The Off Center Dance Theater, a professional company of which Mr. Cavise, 38, is artistic director, and a junior company perform throughout the county at theaters, schools and hospitals. Both companies will perform today at 2 P.M. at the Performing Arts Center at Purchase College.

Mr. Cavise stressed that his studio does not fashion instruction merely toward a year-end recital. He and his wife, a fine arts major at Clark College in Worcester, Mass., where she met Mr. Cavise, an economics major, try to "teach proper technique, alignment and an understanding that dance is an instructional cultural art," he said.

"They have to learn before they can perform," he added, referring to his pupils. For students, terms like *chassé*, *jeté*, *battement*, *tour jeté* and *pirouette* become rote.

In its classes at the studio, Dance Cavise offers a two-track program for its students, who number about 600 and range in age from 3 to 18. The first is the recreational track for children who "look at dance more as an exercise and fun and at the same time are building self-esteem and understanding the structure of the art," Mr. Cavise said.

The second track is the professional one for those students "who have what I consider a combination of desire and talent to excel at the art and become a professional," he said.

"They don't have to have both, but if they have one or the other, I can, and my job is to, take the other half and pull it out of them," Mr. Cavise explained.

Michelle Brigante, 19, who has danced with Mr. Cavise ever since he opened his first studio here, said that he "changed my life." Ms. Brigante's mother entered her in dance classes when she was 10 because, as she said, "I was always dancing around the house."

At first, Ms. Brigante added, she was not interested in performing and in fact quit dancing for a time when she was 17.

But with Mr. Cavise's tutelage, encouragement and coaxing, she is now readying herself to audition before a panel of professional dancers in Manhattan for the Off Center Dance Theater Company.

Ms. Brigante is currently working at Dance Cavise as a substitute for two of the teachers, Dina Giordano and Jamie Himpel, and dreams of dancing and acting professionally.

"Joe always pushed me to see what I have inside of me, and to put that out for everybody to see because he knows that I have it," Ms. Brigante said.

"He's my mentor and inspiration. I love to be on stage and make people laugh and cry with me. It's a rush. It makes you feel wonderful, superior to everyone."

Alexis Brandt, 13, has taken class-

es at Dance Cavise for four years and is part of the junior company. As a teaching demo, she receives a scholarship to cover her tuition in the program and works with younger dancers. She started dancing because she "liked moving around and expressing myself that way." Now she aspires to dance with the senior company.

"I like performing," she said, "being in front of people and trying to be very good." Alexis dances four days a week, which leaves her little time to engage in sports, which she said is fine with her. "I like dance better. It's non-competitive and exercises the entire body."

Brett Fox, 7, is one of the few boys in Dance Cavise, but he loves it. "I like theater, and I love to move flexibly and act and perform," he said. His 10-year-old sister, Heather, who is an apprentice in the Dance Cavise junior company, and his mother teach him how to tap dance in the studio built in their basement.

Does Brett mind that he is one of the few boys brave enough to don leotards and dance in classes com-

'Joe always pushed me to see what I have inside of me.'

posed almost entirely of girls?

"No," he said. "I do like girls."

An intercollegiate wrestler, the 5-foot-5, 140-pound Mr. Cavise said when he took his first dance class at 9 that he knew it was "in my blood." He added, "I realized this was a form of expression that fit me."

Peter Hutchings, 13, who has been dancing with Mr. Cavise since he was 5, started classes because two of his friends were doing so. They have since quit, but Peter said he loves it. "It's exciting," he added. "When I first started taking classes, I would walk out of the studio and dance

his body when he performs it is evident. His students pick up on it and seem to feed off it. Mr. Cavise also knows firsthand how physically grueling and competitive a professional dancer's life is. Still, he sings its rewards and looks for and relishes those students who want to be stars.

"A dancer has to use arms and legs and face and head to tell a story," Mr. Cavise said. "That necessitates an emotional control as well as a physical skill." As a teacher, Mr. Cavise knows how to build such an awareness. As a performer, he knows when he sees a child who has the same insatiable urge to dance that he has.

"I always tell people," he said, "I can see a dancer come and go, and I always know who will definitely come back and who won't because I can feel who has it in their blood and in their heart"

Dance Cavise is offering classes, called Camp Cavise, this summer. Those interested should call 381-5222 for details. ■

