

Parent Handbook for Dance – Pre-Professional Division Elementary and Intermediate Levels

Children in the Pre-Professional Division at the Academy have all had considerable training, either at the Academy or elsewhere, and have an interest in dance that makes the commitment to further and more intensive study an easy choice. Occasionally students are conflicted about the commitment to coming twice per week, especially if it means giving up friends on a soccer team or membership in a chorus or drama club. By the time the young dancer is ready for the Elementary levels, he/she may have already had coaches who are also asking for increased time commitments – and, even at age 8, there are choices to be made. Just as most coaches will not allow a team player to miss half the practices and games or meets, we are not willing to allow students at the Elementary levels to miss half their classes and to come just once per week. Not only will progress in class be poor with 50% attendance, the student may be more susceptible to injury. Poor self-esteem and chronic injuries can be the result of part-time commitments. With students coming twice per week, the amount of material and the degree of difficulty is much greater for the student than coming once per week at a younger age. Students (and parents) who try to take a session off in order to play a season of sports or to do a talent show at school, will have trouble rejoining the ballet class at the same level six weeks later. In the past we have tried offering a once per week class for students who have completed the Basic levels and are ready to go on, but cannot find the time to come twice per week; we dropped this class from the curriculum because students became bored working with easy steps and combinations, but did not have the strength and frequency of repetition to handle more difficult technique. Students who enjoy dance, but wish to come just once per week may find that taking just a Jazz Dance class is a better alternative, but, once again, their progress may not be as rapid as other students in both Jazz and Ballet.

Younger students normally are in Elementary Ballet I and II – a two year curriculum. Older students in Elementary I-II A may be able to cover the two-year curriculum in just one year, but each student is evaluated individually for promotion. Completing a year of work at any of these levels is not a guarantee of promotion to the next level. The student's chronological age, physical development, attendance, ability to focus in class and retain corrections and patterns are all factors teachers consider when they write evaluations. Although some students are disappointed when they are not promoted with their friends, finding themselves in a class – even with friends – that is too difficult is even more frustrating and leads to greater disappointments and poorer self-esteem. Sometimes the repetition of material for another year, or part of a year, helps the student feel at the top of the class and more confident.

There are three levels of Intermediate Ballet at the Academy. During the first year of Intermediate Ballet, students still take ballet class twice per week, and they are required to take Modern Dance. Modern Dance is required for students studying in all three intermediate levels in ballet. The Academy requires modern dance because it: 1) offers the student an opportunity to work creatively; 2) strengthens the torso, and 3) is found in most college dance programs and is therefore important for those students planning to major or minor in dance at the university level. The Academy is committed to historical, codified forms of modern dance – particularly the styles developed by 20th century dance pioneers Martha Graham and Doris Humphrey. Modern Dance is usually taken once per week at each level.

Most Intermediate Ballet students also take Jazz; Intermediate Ballet I students come on Tuesday and Thursday and take ballet each day, and modern one day and usually jazz on the other. Intermediate Ballet II and III students Monday, Wednesday and Friday and take ballet each day, modern on one of the days, and usually jazz on another. Intermediate Ballet II students also take Pre-Pointe class, either once or twice per week. Intermediate Ballet III & IV students take Pointe class twice per week.

ELEMENTARY BALLET LEVELS

There are three Elementary Ballet levels at the Academy:

Elementary Ballet I – ages 7 to 9

Elementary Ballet II – ages 8 to 10

Elementary Ballet I-II A – ages 10 and up

Elementary Ballet students in all levels are required to take ballet class twice per week. In addition to the two ballet classes, many students enjoy taking jazz class once per week.

Admission to the Elementary Ballet levels – and the Continuing levels of Jazz – is by recommendation of the faculty only. Students who have taken the Basic Ballet and Jazz classes receive evaluations with recommendations annually. Students new to the Academy must take a placement class in order to be evaluated for admission to the Elementary levels. Experience and training in other schools varies and is not necessarily equivalent to the Academy's classes. After a placement class, and the recommendation of an Academy teacher, the student may then register for the appropriate level.

INTERMEDIATE BALLET LEVELS

There are three Intermediate Ballet levels at the Academy:

Intermediate Ballet I – Two Ballet Technique and one Modern per week

Intermediate Ballet II – Three Ballet Technique, one Modern

To progress to Pointe, one Pre-Pointe per week minimum

Intermediate Ballet III– Three Ballet Technique and one Modern per week

If Pointe is taken, two Pointe classes per week required

Intermediate Ballet IV– Three Ballet Technique and one Modern per week

If Pointe is taken, two Pointe classes per week required

These are the requirements – many students also take Jazz as an option in addition to the requirements.

The material in the syllabus takes at least a year to master; students with frequent absences will be much less likely to be promoted to the next level. Another factor is that this is an age when children have major growth spurts, and progress is much more difficult at this time. Trying to progress too quickly during the time of major growth can lead to chronic and/or stress-related injuries.

Admission to the Intermediate Ballet levels – and the Continuing levels of Jazz – is by recommendation of the faculty only. Students who have taken lower level classes at the Academy receive evaluations with recommendations annually. Students new to the Academy must take a placement class in order to be evaluated for admission to the Intermediate levels. Experience and training in other schools varies and is not necessarily equivalent to the Academy's classes. Even if a student has been in an “advanced” class and on pointe at another school, the Academy reserves the right to place the student in a lower level class if teachers feel the student does not have the strength and skill to work on pointe. After a placement class, and the recommendation of an Academy teacher, the student may then register for the appropriate level.

The commitment to dance at the Intermediate II, III and IV levels is a major time and financial commitment for a family. The student must be highly motivated and will spend a great deal of time and effort working very hard. Students need to learn to manage their time and deal with homework and school activities in spite of the larger amount of time spent in classes at the Academy. A student engaging in a school activity that interferes with the required dance classes needs to discuss with the teachers or the directors ways in which the work can be “made-up” – especially so that the dancer does not lose flexibility or strength and risk injury. Ballet technique at the upper Intermediate levels is not a casual, recreational activity. It is a highly skilled endeavor and the body needs frequency and repetition to work well at these levels.

Class Regulations – Elementary and Intermediate levels

On the first day of class in the Fall, parents may accompany their dancer into the class in order to meet the teacher. Some teachers will take time to check shoes for names and to trim laces; others will help students fix hair if needed. Teachers will explain to students the rules of the class. Some of these rules may vary slightly from teacher to teacher, but other rules are Academy rules:

NO NUTS, PEANUTS OR ANYTHING MADE WITH PEANUT/NUT PRODUCTS. No Gum in the Academy at any time.

Many students come straight from school and bring snacks. After a long day at school, students need to eat something before beginning a strenuous activity like dance. String cheese, fresh fruit, yoghurt, light quick snacks are best. **HOWEVER, the Academy is a peanut/nut-free zone; we have a large number of children of all ages enrolled who have life-threatening allergies to peanuts, tree nuts and all nut-oils. Even the residue of peanut oil left on a mat or a ballet barre can trigger anaphylactic shock in some of these children. NEVER SEND ANY SNACK CONTAINING PEANUTS, NUTS OR PRODUCTS MADE FROM THESE WITH YOUR CHILD!!** Please read labels on granola bars, chips and other packaged snack foods. If your child loves peanut butter and eats a sandwich in the car on the way to the Academy, your child needs to wash their hands thoroughly with soap before going into class.

Dress Code

The Academy would like teachers to be reasonably strict about the class “uniform” or dress code. At the Elementary levels, girls must have a black tank-topped leotard (spaghetti straps, camisoles and fancy criss-crossed leotards are not tank tops, and although these fancy leotards may be acceptable for class occasionally, they are not acceptable for observations and recitals), pink tights and pink ballet shoes. Girls may wear a short wrap skirt or a pair of black bike-shorts. Boys need black tights, but may wear black leggings or close-fitting black sweat pants or black shorts, black ballet shoes and close-fitting white t-shirts. Long pajama bottoms, baggy shorts and shirts are not acceptable dancewear at the Academy.

Girls with long hair need to learn to put it up in a bun, using a rubber band and strong barrettes. All long hair needs to be fastened back – boys and girls. Part of the curriculum in the Elementary levels includes the study of various kinds of turns. Turning in Ballet – and in Jazz – requires “spotting” – a quick snap of the head and precise focus of the eyes. This can be impossible with hair in the eyes. Bobby pins do not work as well as strong barrettes; the centrifugal force in turning causes pins to fly outward; the hair is no longer restrained and a flying pin can

injure another dancer. A tight sweatband can hold bangs and wisps away from the face. Eyeglasses may need a strap to keep from flying. Focusing the eyes is an important issue, so taking glasses off of a very near-sighted dancer may protect the glasses, but learning to “spot” will be impossible.

When may I observe class?

Official observations are scheduled for two weeks in December and again in March. At that time we put chairs in the classrooms and invite parents, grandparents and/or caregivers to sit and watch class. We really would prefer you come without younger siblings to these observations; our activities are usually such fun that little ones struggle to be allowed to join in, or just have too much trouble sitting quietly. This is distracting to everyone in the room and makes your star performer feel upstaged. Occasionally older siblings are able to sit politely through class. If grandparents live out of town, or working parents cannot come during regularly scheduled observations, we will be happy to make an appointment for a special observation day to accommodate your schedule. At the Elementary levels, teachers may choose unofficial times to invite you to observe. Since the students are coming twice per week, they may master a unit of class work, and the teacher may send home a note inviting you to come. Please try to visit! It is very different to see the hard work of class than it is to see a recital dance. We think you will be amazed by the amount of effort and energy required at the Elementary and Intermediate levels.

Who are the young people helping in class?

Class demonstrators and assistants are from upper level classes at the Academy. A student as young as ten may already be in the pre-professional dance program at the Academy and may have danced for seven years. High school aged students who have acted as demonstrators for a number of years will be supervised and encouraged to learn to lead some of the warm-ups or to assist with class management. The Academy has had for many years a highly successful teacher-training program; many of our current teachers were students and demonstrators here at the Academy at one time. The demonstrators and assistants allow the teachers to focus on the entire class, but also the freedom to work with an individual. Younger dancers enjoy having these older students as role models or “big sisters” (and sometimes, “big brothers”) in class.

What about Jazz Dance?

Many students enjoy taking Jazz dance at the Elementary levels, frequently taking a Continuing Jazz class once per week in addition to ballet. Continuing Jazz is offered in a syllabus with four levels – Continuing I, II, III and IV. Elementary level ballet students can usually begin with no experience in Continuing I or II Jazz (although some ballet students, who have never had any jazz, either as a single class

or during a summer workshop, may need to take a Beginning Jazz class). The Jazz recital is in May. All of the above information about Elementary Ballet is applicable to Jazz Dance, except that the class uniform is a black tank-topped leotard, black jazz pants and black jazz shoes.

Will there be a recital?

All children enrolled in Elementary Ballet are all eligible to participate in two recitals during the academic year – in December in our own theatre upstairs at the Academy and in the big recital – usually the second Saturday in June. Each class performs its own dance in December, and learns and practices during class time, usually beginning to work on a dance in late October; there is a dress rehearsal the afternoon on the same day as the evening performances. Regular classes run through the end of May, however, starting in April, teachers use a portion of class time to teach dances for the recital. It is important for the teachers to know whether or NOT you plan for your child to participate in the recital. It is very difficult to plan choreography without knowing how many dancers – odd or even numbers, etc. You will receive a mailing in early April detailing what the recital will be and rehearsal schedules. Included is a permission slip and ticket order form. It is VERY important that these forms be returned to us as soon as possible. The two weeks prior to the June recital, there are no regular classes, but there are several rehearsals with all classes working together to glue the separate dances into the theatrical show we call our “recital”. We usually choose children’s stories, fairy tales or great classical works for our shows. The performance is at the Oak Park and River Forest High School’s Main Auditorium. We try to produce as professional a performance as possible with beautiful costumes and theatrical lighting and sets. There is a recital fee for each performer which helps us to provide the costumes, pay for the theatre rental and all the extra hours for the staff and theatre crew and additional insurance costs. We ask parents to volunteer time to help with various things, but it is not “required”. Costumes, many from previous years, are the property of the Academy. Most children love the experience; the shows are not more than an hour and a half, so most parents and grandparents enjoy watching. For families new to the Academy and the recital, we have videos from previous years that are available to borrow. Watching a recital video with your child will help you make a decision about participating.

Academy of Movement & Music

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