



# Graceful Dancing

Ballet shares expression, emotion of a beautiful art form

BY KRISTI RITTER • PHOTOS BY PAUL LITMAN

Stephanie Kelemen was 7 years old when she saw her first performance of “The Nutcracker.” It only took that one performance of watching the dancers move gracefully across the stage to hook Kelemen, who immediately wanted her own beautiful costume and ballet slippers to perform on stage.

“The Nutcracker” has become a holiday favorite worldwide, sharing the story of a young German girl who dreams of a Nutcracker Prince and a fierce battle against a Mouse King with seven heads.

Originally performed on Dec. 18, 1892, in St. Petersburg, Russia, the music of “The Nutcracker” is the great work of Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky, a Russian composer of the Romantic Era. Set to classical music with invigorating melodies, the ballet was choreographed to share the story.

The ballet didn’t make its way to the United States until 1944, when it was

performed by the San Francisco Ballet. From there, it made its way across the country.

While “The Nutcracker” is only one of the ballets well known today, it’s probably the one most little girls relate to when they think of graceful dancers dressed in sparkly costumes and dancing slippers.

Kelemen started in ballet classes the year after seeing her first performance, embarking on a love that has carried her throughout her life. Now 15, she enjoys the independence it gives her.

“I really like the way I can control myself in ballet. I’m not dependent on anyone else,” she says. “It’s up to me to determine my own success.”

In the highest level at Longmont Dance Theatre, Kelemen is a dedicated dancer who practices daily to perfect her technique. “For me, ballet is a way to express myself.”

Longmont Dance Theatre owner



Jillian Hill stretches her leg before her ballet class at Dance Dimensions, as Alexis Nehls follows suit. Above left: Joey Prendergast practices at the barre at Longmont Dance Theatre. Above right: Longmont Dance Theatre owner Kristin Kingsley St. John helps Elise Ferguson. Opposite page: Foreground moving back, Olivia Fertig, Holly Kuyt and Grace Ireland.





Chris Cooper, left, and Jacob Triplett practice ballet movements at Dance Dimensions.



Dance Dimensions teacher Jessica Simpson instructs dancers, from left, Takara Thede, Katelyn Kittilson and Jenny Friesner in ballet movements.

Kristin Kingsley St. John can relate to the beauty and expression that ballet offers. By age 2.5, she had already put on her first pair of ballet shoes in Kansas City, Mo., where she grew up. By age 9, she had her heart set on being a professional dancer.

Upon graduation she was offered a full scholarship to any Missouri college, as well as an offer to study with the Kansas City Ballet. She embarked into night school to continue her academic successes, but also took the job with the ballet company, where she studied professionally from 1993 to 1996.

Moving to Longmont, she was offered a full-time position teaching dance at Back Stage Danza on Main Street, a company that had a long history in the area. In only a short time though she learned of its impending

closure, and in 1998, she purchased the business. She also realized that seeing her students dance on stage was more enjoyable than dancing herself, so she retired from professional dancing and put her effort into the school.

Longmont Dance Theatre is now in its 13th year, offering classes for a variety of dances, including ballet, tap, hip hop, jazz, modern and Flamenco.

For Kingsley St. John, offering the school is more than just one aspect. "It's not only me putting on the show anymore, it's the students helping to put on the art form," she says. "And the respect the students carry for it is great."

Ballet is an art form that builds a strong foundation, combining passion, beauty and athleticism. The beautiful emotion that comes out of the upper body defines the technique the dancers

study and the appreciation they have for the art form.

"The students have such a passion for what they do," Kingsley St. John says. "And on stage that passion shows."

Cara Cooper, a dancer with the Colorado Ballet who grew up learning dance at Dance Dimensions in Longmont, enjoys the freedom and expression that ballet offers. "Ballet is so much more about the story and the characters that you're portraying," she says. "That's the part I fell in love with."

As a graduate of Ute Creek Secondary Academy in Longmont, Cooper took a variety of dance classes at Dance Dimensions before deciding to transition solely to ballet. "Ballet is wonderful for children because it helps with strength, balance, musicality and discipline," she says.



At Longmont Dance Theatre, from left, Sarah Moore, Grace Ireland, Olivia Fertig and Katy Hirano practice ballet at the barre.

Check out this season's performances of "The Nutcracker."

**Longmont Dance Theatre's "The Nutcracker"**

Dec. 4 at 2 and 7 p.m.  
Dec. 5 at 2 p.m.  
Niwot High School  
8989 E. Niwot Road, Niwot  
\$18 adults, \$12 seniors/students  
For tickets, call 303-772-1335



Emily AnnMarie Pietruszka, right, and Galen Temple-Wood, in the Nutcracker Ballet produced by the Longmont Dance Theatre in 2008. (Joshua Buck)

**Longmont Symphony Orchestra and Boulder Ballet's "The Nutcracker"**

Dec. 4 at 4 p.m., Dec. 5 at 2 p.m.  
Vance Brand Civic Auditorium,  
600 E. Mountain View Ave., Longmont  
\$11 to \$29  
For tickets, call 303-772-5796 or visit  
[www.longmontsymphony.org](http://www.longmontsymphony.org)

Though Cooper studies full-time with the Colorado Ballet, she enjoys the opportunities when she can teach at Dance Dimensions, working hand-in-hand with the students, even her little brother who takes classes.

While one may think ballet and dance classes are more for girls, that's not the case as more boys are finding the classes to be fun and strengthening. Alfred Backman, a dancer at Longmont Dance Theatre, started lessons in 2007 after his mom told him about the ballet lessons she took as a child. Studying both ballet and modern dance, Backman has enjoyed every aspect of the instruction. "I kind of feel nervous and excited when I'm on stage performing," he says.

Backman has performed in "The Nutcracker" three times – two times in the role as the Prince – and is looking forward to this year's performance.

Kingsley St. John says it's great to see boys coming in because they can become strong, athletic and graceful. And while boys have a different training ground, the classes for boys are full of movement, modern techniques and ballet foundations.

Cooper says working with kids can be extremely rewarding by showing them what has worked for her and what may work for them. There is so much freedom to be artistic.

The interpretation of ballet is also important. "For me, ballet is about the ability to tell a story and to specifically get to experience another character's life, emotions and movement," she says. "And because ballet is not bogged down by speech, it allows for individual interpretation."

Through the beauty and grace of ballet, dancers are able to share their expressions through the movement. And when those movements tell a story all their own, it's the chance to appreciate the art.



**Check it Out**

Longmont Dance Theatre and Dance Dimensions both offer a variety of dance classes, ranging from ballet to hip hop. Visit Longmont Dance Theatre at [www.longmontdancetheatre.com](http://www.longmontdancetheatre.com) or call 303-772-1335. Visit Dance Dimensions at [www.dancedimensions.net](http://www.dancedimensions.net) or call 303-772-3750.