

Observer & Eccentric
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(F) 18



Instructor Beth Helmig puts her ballet class through its paces in Stage Door, decorated with a professional theme to create a backstage aura.

Dancers put their best foot forward

By JACKIE ELEN

The Stage Door, newly opened in Southfield, is more than a dance studio. The owners call it "home of theatrical arts" where they hope aspiring stars will be launched.

Partners Carol Kaufman of Southfield and Mary Debele of Farmington Hills were having trouble choosing an appropriate name for their new business in Farmington's Plaza on Southfield Road between Twelve and Thirteenth Mile.

"We tossed around the idea of using K

for Kaufman and M for Mary in a clever way and all we could come up with was K-Mart," Mrs. Kaufman said. "Obviously that lacked originality, didn't fit and we couldn't afford a lawsuit."

Credit for the name, Stage Door, goes to Mrs. Debele's husband, an architect. But the "codirectors" of the studio have carried out the concept with aplomb.

THE FIRST touch of show but in a wall grouping of pictures of all time favorites like Shirley Temple, Fred Astaire and Spanky of the old "Our Gang" Comedy days.

The professional theme throughout creates an exciting backstage aura of legitimate theatre. In fact, one of the courses offered to preschoolers is "Broadway Babes."

"We teach little ones from three to about eight-years-old rhythmic tap or Hawaiian dance," Mrs. Kaufman said. "Ballet is too strenuous and dangerous for small ones. Beginners use ballet arm movements which give them poise and grace without hurting their bodies."

Older children, teens and adults learn tap, ballet, jazz, toe and Hawaiian dance.

pre-teen and "guys' and gals'" chorus work, disco and exercises, depending on their ages.

MRS. KAUFMAN and Mrs. Debele met when they were dance teachers in another studio. Their younger students have performed in state fairs, showing off their flair for musical comedy in their routines.

"Kids love to entertain for organizations and we encourage it," said Mrs. Debele. "There's nothing like an appreciative audience to instill self-confidence and we hope some of our students will go on to show business careers."

The 30 to 45-year-old students are into disco dancing in a big way, said Mrs. Kaufman. They do the hustle in a line or with partners, the bus stop, the bump and what the teachers dubbed the "Stage Door Hustle."

"Disco is sophisticated," said Mrs. Debele. "It can be danced to a Latin beat, Glen Miller's old music or the fox trot. But it has a definite pattern that's a lot smoother than doing your own thing."

ANOTHER POPULAR dance with women is tap, Mrs. Kaufman noted. She can't explain why but thinks the resurgence may be attributed to "No No Nanny."

Speaking of her own background, Mrs. Kaufman started taking dancing lessons from Julie Adler at the age of five. She went into ballet in a Detroit studio where actress Joan Leslie took lessons.

"I had a dance master with a yardstick which he didn't hesitate to use and after three years, that ended my career in ballet," Mrs. Kaufman remembered. "After that I performed for the USO at Selfridge Field and retired to have three children."

The Kaufman youngsters, Mike, 14, Sue, 17 and Michelle, 19, have all danced in local productions and school plays and do choreography. Their mother was choreographer for "Oklahoma," a Southfield summer theatre production.

MRS. DEBELE has been teaching dance for 26 years, starting at the age of 12 when she held classes in her basement. She does ballet, tap, jazz, ethnic character dancing, acrobatics and choreography for professional and amateur theatre groups. She appeared on a weekly television show when she was in her teens. Her daughter Dawn, 17, is also a dancer.

In Stage Door room two, little girls from six to nine-years-old are doing double shuffle, slap and triple shuffle tap routines. They've been taking lessons since they were three and do a great "Dark Town Strutters' Ball" chorus line.

In room one, Beth Helmig is teaching ballet. She's billed as associate director of Stage Door along with Roxanne Rooney, Hawaiian dance teacher, and Marvin Kaufman, husband of one of the codirectors, who lends a hand with disco classes.

Alan Onickel, 18, of Southfield takes ballet lessons for benefit in his drama classes in college.

"YOU CAN'T ignore any art form when you're hoping for a career as an actor," he said. "Singing, dancing and drama complement each other."

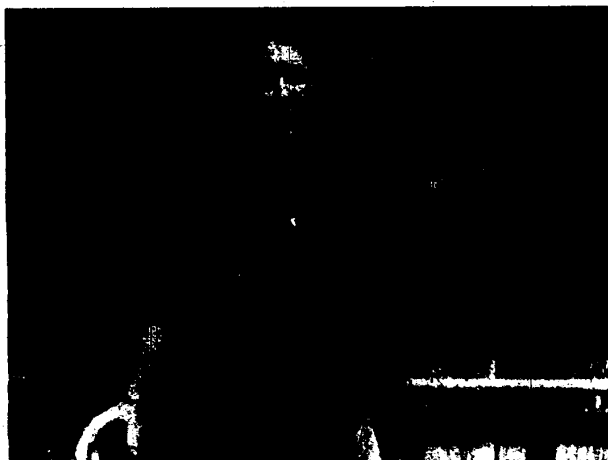
Steve Bauer, 18, of Lathrup Village is another ballet student who is serious about a career in theatre. Both he and Alan have appeared in musical productions and Steve is a magician as well.

"It's really gratifying to feel you may be somewhat instrumental in launching a ca-

reer in show business," said Mrs. Kaufman. "But we love giving lessons to new dancers because they're easy to teach. We're getting more men in our classes and women are taking ballet. They don't plan on becoming professionals but they're having fun and so are we."



Farmington High School student Donnell Gallagher is a serious student of the dance and who one day hopes to have a career in show business.

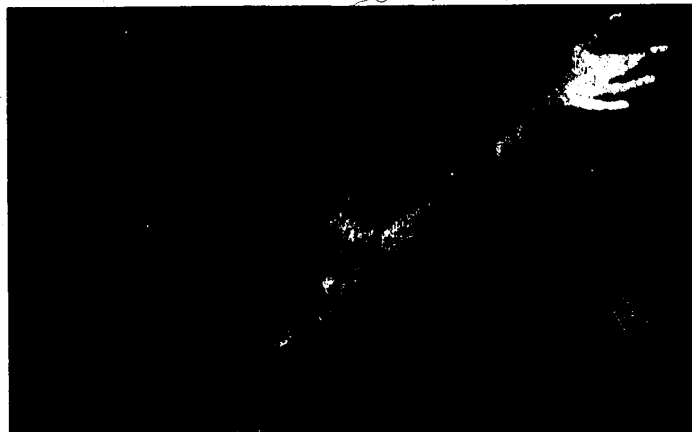


Donnell Gallagher, a young ballerina from Farmington, works out at the bar.

Staff
photos
by Steve
Cantrell



Roxanne Rooney is the Hawaiian dance teacher at Stage Door, who works out regularly with the ballet class.



Stephen Bauer finishes a routine with a touch of flair, playing to an approving audience in Stage Door.