

Dancer returns, now everything's in balance

Story: CORINNE ABATT
Photo: JOHN STANO

After many years in the spotlight on

the world's stages, ballerina Joanne Danto has returned home. Not to rest or change careers, but to continue dancing and teaching with Birmingham

as home base.

Miss Danto graduated from Seaholm High School and went to New York City to study and perform. She has been a soloist with the Pennsylvania Ballet Company, the National Ballet Company of Washington D.C., the Frankfurt (Germany) Ballet Company, the Joffrey and the New York City Opera Company.

"I like living in Birmingham," she said. "My family is here. Things are happening here and I'm really quite pleased."

She wasn't sure about the opportunities that would be available when she made the decision to return here with her 14-month-old daughter. But the offers came quickly.

She is just finishing up a series of seminars at the Jewish Community Center and will be teaching at Interlochen for much of the summer. She is looking forward to that because she's an Interlochen alum.

ANOTHER EVENT THAT is still in the talking stage is a special pas de deux in a Michigan Opera Theatre production of "Die Fledermaus" next fall.

As she talked about her future, she said, "I would eventually like to have my own company, but not now. . . I will always be involved with dance. I have a lot to contribute, I have been there."

She doesn't miss the life of constant traveling, performing on different stages every week and the lack of a home base. Her daughter, she said, has given balance to her life.

"Because of this child, I no longer lead a self-indulgent existence, dancing before mirrors."

She has taught in the past and likes it as long as the circumstances are agreeable. She was troubled by the noticeable variance of skill levels in one of her recent classes here.

"I'm afraid some of them aren't getting anything out of it," she said after one class. Her tired students disagreed. They assured her (while massaging legs) that being in the room with her when she demonstrated was an education in itself.

When she was in New York City for the first time, she received an offer for a graduate assistant and teaching fellowship from Indiana University.

While there, she worked under Gilbert Reed and was the leading dancer with the Indiana University Ballet.

"I loved it for two reasons," she said. "One, the training was much better, more personalized, and two, there was a lot of performing."

ROBERT JOFFREY, whose school she had attended when she was in New York, saw her in one of the Indiana University productions and asked her to join his company. She did, but didn't like it because the work was too contemporary for her taste.

She did like working with Reed, whom she said "has done some incredibly beautiful things."

While she has been labeled "a Balanchine dancer," she doesn't object to it.

"Most American dancers are trained in many schools (theories) rather than just one and yet somehow we manage," she said. "I'm not sure it's the best way it's really a lot of luck, where you land and who is teaching at the time."

One of the most important aspects of American dance that she thinks about a lot is choreography. It's a vital part of her career.

"I think what American dancers have been looking for for a long time is good choreography," she said. "Of course, there's Balanchine, Robbins, Tudor and Dennis Nahat, director of the Cleveland Ballet Company, has

done some. But we need to encourage choreographers."

"I think dancers working in a company should be given the opportunity to do it. At least they would have an idea of what the choreographer is going through."

While she is at Interlochen, her former Interlochen dance instructor and longtime friend Helen Earl will change places and teach a series of seminars at Oakland University.

Miss Danto isn't sure what directions her Michigan-based career will take. But, so far, she's pleased that it's started and on its way.



Joanne Danto, a top professional dancer, brings a wealth of experience to her teaching.

Bon Voyage launches reading program

The Southfield Public Library program, "Passport to Books," is being launched with a Bon Voyage Party at 2 p.m. Saturday, June 21. The party is slated for the Southfield Pavilion.

Marjorie Brown and the storytellers will be featured in a program of drama, songs, poetry, puppets and fun. The free program is for school age children and will last about one hour. No registration is required.

Bus transportation to the party is available from selected schools and the Beechwoods Reading Center to the Civic Center Library.

The bus will leave Grace School at 1 p.m. and return at 3:15 p.m.; Beech Woods at 1:15 p.m. and return at 3:25 p.m.; Grace School at 1:30 p.m. and return at 3:40 p.m.; Magnolia School at 1 p.m. and return at 3:15 p.m.; Vandenberg at 1:15 p.m. and return at 3:25 p.m.; and Simms at 1:30 p.m. and return at 3:40 p.m.

The library is at the Civic Center, 26000 Evergreen. For more information call the library, children's division, at 354-9100.

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