



Brianna Murphy, Stephanie Meyer, and Maria Ricar head the ensemble in "Sing, Sing, Sing."

Jazz Camp for Grownups

Rediscovering the joys of summer camp through dance

By Lisa Traiger

EVERY SUMMER ANJALI HANSEN'S THREE KIDS DO TOTALLY COOL CAMPS—everything from a Washington Ballet summer intensive to a sailing camp to a Smithsonian Institution-sponsored dinosaur camp. So Hansen, of Falls Church, VA, has found a rhythm in her life: She packs lunches, drives and drops off the kids, does the errands and laundry, and turns around to pick them up.

What more could she ask for? How about her own summer dance camp, for grownups? Last summer, Hansen, who studied ballet as a young girl in California and danced recreationally as a single Washington lawyer, signed on for Summer Stock, a Broadway jazz intensive for adults and teens ages 16 and up. For one week, she turned her life upside down and left the carpooling and kitchen duty to her husband, trusted friends, and a part-time babysitter. "I had no idea what I

was getting myself into," says Hansen. "But I'm glad I did it."

Summer Stock is the brainchild of Douglas Yeuell, executive director of Joy of Motion Dance Center in Washington, DC. The workshop allows stay-at-home moms and corporate execs, retirees and high schoolers a chance to smell the greasepaint and hear the roar of the crowd. "I was totally bitten by the bug when I did summer theater work in southwestern Virginia," says Yeuell, who oversees four studio locations that offer more than 350 classes a week.

While Yeuell's administrative duties don't allow him much opportunity to teach, perform, and choreograph these days, he still pines for the musical theater experiences of his youth. And he continues to teach one of the school's longest-running and most popular weekday classes, Broadway Jazz, on Friday mornings. An upbeat mixture of

classic jazz from Fosse, Giordano, and Robbins, it features show tunes from standard Broadway musicals along with today's trendier shows like *Rent*, *Mamma Mia*, and *Hairspray*.

"I have such an aching longing and passion for musical theater that I decided, a couple of years ago, to ramp it up a notch," Yeuell said one hot summer Friday, still glowing from the vigorous workout he had led moments before. In the tradition of the barnstorming Mickey Rooney/Judy Garland musicals of the 1930s and '40s (*Babes in Arms* being the classic), Yeuell thought, with an in-house theater and a growing clientele of jazz dancers, why not replicate the summer-stock experience? "But," he said, "this summer stock was going to be for adults, for all those people just like me who want to be in a show but just don't have the time or the energy to do a full-length show. In a week's

time we can still do quite a bit." In completing its third year, Summer Stock hit its stride.

Each year Yeuell picks two pieces of music and maps out his choreographic strategy well before his adult campers arrive on Monday morning, ready to dance. He has done numbers from *Hairspray*, *Fosse*, *Guys and Dolls*, *Damn Yankees*, and other musical-theater warhorses. The veteran teacher has a knack for instructing rank beginners and professional-level dancers simultaneously without talking down to or overwhelming either. "I choose music from musicals that I know will be accessible and accommodating to many different styles and levels. And length is an important factor because you only have a week to choreograph it, set it, rehearse it, put it up onstage and get the costumes, the makeup, and everything else." He says he loves to work on numbers with plenty of style and panache because he knows that especially with adult performers, attitude and style make a number entertaining.

As for costumes, he says, "People love to play dress up, even adults." So he asks his students to rummage through



Summer Stock teacher and choreographer Douglas Yeuell and Barbara Berau share a moment of fun before the show.

their closets for appropriate gear. "The Crapshooters' Dance" from *Guys and Dolls* called for fedoras and pin-stripes, while a Fosse-esque number might sparkle with silver sequins from last year's holiday festivities and off-the-rack party wear.

Summer Stock succeeds because of its intensive environment and the fact that the adults, beginner dancers or professionals, want to be there and realize that they have just a short time to accomplish a great deal. Each morning starts with a jazz class warm-up, including basics like pliés, tendus, stretches, isolations, and breakdowns of step-ball-change and pirouette. The day continues with rehearsal for the first number, then an

hour-long lunch break—when reportedly many of the students continue practicing their moves. The second number is taught and rehearsed after lunch, and by Friday the group—last summer, 19 dancers ranging in age from 16 to 73—is ready for tech and dress rehearsal. On Saturday a crew converts the studio into a theater and Summer Stock shares an hour-long program with dancers from the school's youth dance camps and resident companies.

Hansen found the days, which ran from 9:30 A.M. to 4:00 P.M., both physically and mentally challenging. "What was so great," she says, "was the diversity of the group. We had dancers of all levels. Some people got the steps easily and others, like me, worked really hard to focus on the choreography."

Former ballet dancer Christina Prete, 33, says that now that she is transitioning away from ballet, Summer Stock proved the perfect alternative. "I loved every minute of it," says Prete, a teacher at Corinne Phelps Robertson School of Dance in Bethesda, MD. "I had an absolutely wonderful time. Everyone who was involved was so eager, and that's one of the joys of being in a program with adults versus children or teenagers. They were all there because they loved dance, no matter what their background."

Like Hansen, Michelle Gordon, 52, rearranged her life for Summer Stock. A physical therapist and grandmother, she says, "I basically plan my whole summer around it. I just love the sheer joy of being with other people who inhabit the planet dance, and I love being part of the whole amazing process of putting on a show. Sure, you're exhausted at the end of the day, but also exhilarated. Every brain cell and every muscle in your body is trying to keep up."

Anthony Pape-Calabrese, 16, was among the youngest students in the program. The high school junior says he was surprised at first "because I didn't know what to

O'MARA
SPRUNG FLOORS

VISUALIZE
YOURSELF
ON AN
O'MARA
SPRUNG FLOOR

4x4 Practice Floors to
Full Size Studio Floors

To See How Our Sprung Floor Works, Request Our Free
Video or Visit Our Website www.SprungFloors.com

3130 Eugene Street • Burton, MI 48519 • 810-743-8281 • www.SprungFloors.com

expect. I was one of just two guys. But I felt very comfortable even though there were people there who had been [jazz dancing] for a long time. Everyone helped me out and was very tolerant, gave me pointers and made me feel really welcome." Pape-Calabrese, a budding actor who played Cyrano last year, signed on to improve his dancing abilities and get closer to that prized "triple threat" ability.

For many in the group, 73-year-old Adrienne Price—tall, graceful, with a regal crown of silver-gray cropped hair—proved an inspiration for her stamina as much as her age. A retired university administrator, she says, "I didn't know what to do with myself after my husband died." Her sister, a professional dancer, suggested that she try a dance class. Price found Broadway jazz and has been dancing for about eight years now; Summer Stock is one of her favorite activities. "I like the camaraderie, and Doug's openness and excitement just drew me in," Price says. "I forget my age when I come in to dance."

The beauty of this program is that in the dance studio, before a bank of mirrors, everyone is equal. There are corporate executives, a cheerleader, a vice president of a bank, a psychiatrist, a church administrator, and a few teens still in high school. No matter. For a week, they all have one thing in common: putting on the best show they possibly can.

Gordon, the physical therapist, fell in love with the camaraderie of the group. "As much as I loved dancing all day, lunch was so much fun. I felt like a kid in regular camp—we all really got along very well." And that special distant summer camp experience of her youth came back to her as the group, excited and nervous, gathered backstage before curtain time. They joined hands in a circle and passed along a special squeeze. Kids and adults, pros and novices, they were all pumped to perform after a week of Summer Stock. ✦

'I basically plan my whole summer around it. I just love the sheer joy of being with other people who inhabit the planet dance, and I love being part of the whole amazing process of putting on a show.'

—camper Michelle Gordon



Taquiena Boston, Steve Vago, Maggie Kemper, Stephanie Meyer, and Beth Buck, ready to perform excerpts from *Guys and Dolls*, join hands for a pre-show "good luck" circle.

TIPS FOR DEVELOPING AN ADULT SUMMER CAMP PROGRAM

Yeuell's goal in planning and programming Summer Stock is simple: "I want people to feel a sense of success and accomplishment." That means choreographing for multiple levels in a single dance, and knowing how to break down complex phrases and simplify breakneck pacing when necessary—but without patronizing often sensitive adult learners. Here are a few pointers.

- Plan weeklong sessions. Most adult learners don't have limitless time to devote to an extracurricular workshop. A week of vacation is reasonable. Yeuell is considering expanding the program in the future, but he will always allow for self-contained weeks in order to attract adult learners who might not have the opportunity to dance intensively throughout the year.
- Choose your theme and music early, but be ready to adjust your choreography to the level of dancers who show up that first day and for any last-minute dropouts during the week.
- If students are responsible for costumes, email them in advance about which type of fashions you're looking for. Plan on having a swap and try-on session mid-week.
- If your goal is a full-fledged performance, find other classes and groups to share the stage with your class in order to fill out the evening.
- Be positive and allow your students to have fun. Most of them took time off from their day jobs and families to try a week of dance camp. Let them enjoy the spotlight without too much pressure. —LT