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## Ballet Hispanico School of Dance Rocks

Posted: 09/25/2013 7:20 pm

T.S. Eliot wrote that April is the cruelest month. He wasn't a mom.

Moms know that September and June are the grueling ones. Those are the months when school and extracurricular activities first crank up, and then crescendo in a grand finale, demanding 187 percent of a mom's already stretched-thin time, attention, and energy.

I love September with its brisk air and quickening pace. I dread it, too. It's a travail of scheduling and logistics. Who takes what class, when, and how do they get there? Is there enough time for the schlep? On Tuesdays, can the piano lesson squeeze in after tennis and before homework? Tutor on Wednesday, and is there even one afternoon free for a playdate?

It makes me wish I had a degree in organization and management, instead of English literature.

Some of my children are out of college; I'm down to one eight year old. The pressure is reduced. Still I wrestle with that ineluctable mix of love, frustration, and determination as I arrange my daughter's after school hours into something meaningful. And doable.

The goal is for my daughter to sample pastimes that she may enjoy enough to pursue as lifelong hobbies. Perhaps she'll meet new friends and create a peer group outside school, which can be a welcome refuge during those agonizing teenage years. Maybe she'll even discover her passion, her career. Probably she'll simply enjoy herself in the moment, and she'll be a little richer for having tried something new, for having experimented.

These are weighty considerations. Coordinating them with class times, transportation, free choice, and, yes, the cost within an overall family budget, is a daunting task.

So it was with great pleasure that I found myself at the orientation meeting for the General Program at [Ballet Hispanico](#), where Director AnaMaria Correa welcomed me with a warm handshake. She smiled and said she was here to make the opening of school smooth.

She meant it, too. The orientation was a pleasure, with coffee and snacks served, and brightly colored student handbooks and program brochures distributed.

Ms. Correa was a bright, energetic presence at the podium as she welcomed parents and students, introduced her staff, and explained the school's dress code, attendance policy, and rules. She spoke with pleasure and grace about respecting the beautiful art form of dance. She underscored the need to commit to the good citizenship, elegance, and preparedness a rigorous school requires.

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"But don't think of this as discipline in the negative sense. These are life skills. You're bringing your child to us and we have a responsibility to you to help create artists. You can't create great artists without structure and expectation. In June, you expect to see your child transformed, and this is how we do it."

The school strives for excellent communication with parents. "We're setting up a class parent program. We also have new advisors and coordinators for each department, who are here to answer any questions and to help you, especially if your child is transitioning from lower school to middle school, from middle school to high school, or even from high school to college," said Ms. Correa. She encouraged parents to think of the advisors as resources and to reach out with questions and comments.

Each advisor spoke with dedication and enthusiasm. I was impressed. These are people who take dance and dance education seriously, yet who retain the joy of their art. They're excited to be there and that washes through the school like sunlight. The school is full of positive energy which radiates from the hearts of teachers and staff and is reflected back by students and parents. The very air in the studios tingles with purpose. Maybe that's why Ballet Hispanico was invited to Sesame Street last year to film a show?

Deputy Director Nicholas Villeneuve described what makes the school unique. "Our students train in multiple techniques, but we take our Spanish *sabor* and fuse the Spanish and Flamenco dance with the disciplines of classical ballet and modern."

The program brochure mentioned a lengthy list of accomplishments. Ms. Correa's favorite might have been the accreditation of the school by the National Association of Schools of Dance.

When she and I spoke before her presentation, I said that my middle daughter attended the Pre-Professional program some years ago; she explained that adult classes had been cut and the school had been restructured to focus on what they do best: teach kids.

The restructuring is paying off. Enrollment in the school has grown dramatically over the last few years. Parents like me appreciate the structure, warmth, courtesy, and attention to each kid. I looked around and saw many faces as interested and pleased as mine. It was a diverse group, too--my blond-haired, blue-eyed daughter would easily fit in.

Indeed, my little one loves her classes. "They're fast, they fly by, mommy," she told me, after her first Saturday morning of ballet and jazz. "My legs hurt. But I think I'll be a dancer when I grow up."



For an ending quote for Ballet Hispanico, a place which is both serious and joyous, I'll draw a phrase from Pablo Neruda: "As if you were on fire from within..." because the Ballet Hispanico School of Dance shines that way.

*Photo credit: Christopher Duggan*