

# En l'Air

News from  
MASSACHUSETTS  
ACADEMY of  
BALLET  
Educational Training  
Association

## SPRING 2011



Combined Level 3-4 Class. Photo: Loran Diehl Saito

## Passion. Perseverance. Partnership.

**The Massachusetts Academy of Ballet: 2005-2011**

by Alison Wood

In July 2005, Rose and Charles Flachs made their dream come true: they opened the Massachusetts Academy of Ballet.

After years of professional dance, teaching, and choreographing, what they really wanted was a studio to call their own, where they could teach progressive classical ballet modeled on Vaganova—the Russian training method that has created many of the best dancers in the world—and also provide an artistic education for nonprofessional students who want to learn ballet, hone their interest, and perfect their skills.

In the fall of 2005, classes commenced at the Academy in a new studio located at Holyoke's Open Square, a space consisting of one room and a small platform in the waiting area for creative movement students. During the first year, 25 students enrolled in the program.

By 2008, the Academy had grown by leaps and bounds. Increased enrollment and additional class offerings prompted an expansion and redesign. The new space would come to include two studios, both featuring state-of-the-art sprung floors, as well as new dressing rooms and a reconfigured reception area. With a larger space, the Flachs launched the Academy's summer camp program, offering classes for the younger ages as well as intensives for more experienced dancers.

In 2008, the Academy's commitment to artistic enrichment began to extend beyond the studio walls when the Flachs established the Massachusetts Academy of Ballet Educational Training Association (MABETA). Conceived as a nonprofit initiative, the mission of MABETA is to educate residents of Holyoke and the surrounding communities

see "Passion," page 6

### Dance to Stop Hunger

**April 9, 3:00 pm**

Massachusetts Academy  
of Ballet Studio

4 Open Square Way, Suite 403  
Holyoke, MA

Check or cash donations accepted.  
Proceeds to benefit MABETA and Kate's  
Soup Kitchen in Holyoke, MA.

MABETA members and MAB students perform an excerpt from *Sleeping Beauty*, new choreography by guest artist Matisse Madden and MAB director Charles Flachs, plus demonstrations about the rigor and joy of ballet training.

Call 536-6200 for more information.

### Spring Performance and Silent Auction

**June 11, 2:00 pm**

Holyoke War Memorial  
310 Appleton Street  
Holyoke, MA

Silent Auction begins at 1:00.

Tickets are \$10.00. Children, 8 years old and younger, are free of charge.

A reception will follow the performance.

Choreographers Matisse Madden, Debra Vega and Charles Flachs. Guest artists Connie Flachs and Daniel Grzelak, from the Pennsylvania Academy of Ballet, and Kelsey Chamberlain, Mercyhurst Dance Program.

Call 536-6200 for more information  
and ticket reservations.

## The Massachusetts Academy of Ballet

4 Open Square Way, Studio 403 • Holyoke, MA 01040 • 413.536.6200 • [massacademyofballet.com](http://massacademyofballet.com)



## Behind the Scenes:

### An Interview with MAB Costume Mistress Arlene Kowal

by Cathy Johnson



A hush falls over the audience as the lights dim and the first chords of music are heard. In the wings, the dancers wait in excited anticipation as the curtain opens and they listen for the musical cue that signals their entrance. The audience settles in to enjoy another magical MAB performance. Backstage, in the costume room, there is a flurry of activity that will remain throughout the performance. This is where you will find our fabulous costume mistress, Arlene Kowal, hard at work as she performs her own special magic. I recently had the opportunity to ask Arlene some questions about her unique talents. Here you will learn, as I did, more about why we are so lucky to have her as part of our MAB family.

*Arlene fits Lila Horton in a bonbon costume for the December 2010 Nutcracker & Sweets performance at Wistariahurst Museum  
Photo: Loran Diehl Saito*

C: When did you start sewing and did you have any formal training?

A: I lived with my grandmother for many years and she made all my clothes. I learned by watching her. I seem to remember making a tutu for fun when I was about 6 years old using scraps of materials. Later, I did study clothing and specifically costume-making on my own. In those days, if I wanted something new to wear I had no choice but to save my money and make it!

I have, over the years, tackled any sewing job that needed doing—my clothing, my children's, doll clothes, draperies, wedding gowns, prom dresses, slipcovers, bedcovers, window shades, table linens, etc. I always felt that if someone else figured out how to make these things then so could I. I especially love the creative part—making something that looks good. That makes any sewing job a pleasure.

C: How long have you been making costumes?

A: This really dates me! Let's just say my first costume was when I was about 6 years old—the tutu made with scrap materials.

C: You have worked as a school teacher in the past. Has this influenced your work as a costume designer?

A: I taught in the public schools for 38 years—many subjects—with history and social studies being my favorite. I have traveled, with gathering teaching ideas and resources in mind, to as many foreign ports as possible. Over the past 10 years, I have focused on countries in East and South Asia for my current work as a teacher seminar leader for the Five College Center for East Asian Studies at Smith College and Global Studies at Clark University.

My daughter started ballet at a young age and volunteers were needed to make costumes...and so it began 35 years ago! I started as a parent volunteer and was then asked to be the costumer for Pioneer Valley Ballet. I also did costumes for UMass, Mount Holyoke, Walnut Hill...and the list goes on.

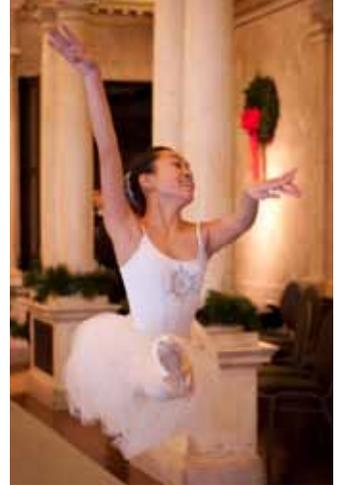
C: What types of costumes do you typically make? Have you always worked within the ballet world or have you designed for theatre or other arts-related projects?

A: I basically design just dance costumes, although when my son was at Williston-Northampton, I did volunteer for theatre costumes.

# Nutcracker & Sweets 2010

Wistariaburst Museum

December 10-12, 2010



Photos: Theodore Paradise

## Summer 2011 Program Schedule

### Workshops for Young Children

#### Introduction to Ballet • Ages 4 ~ 5

JULY 25-29 • M-F: 9:00-12:00

Young ballet enthusiasts will explore the art of classical ballet by learning elementary ballet, improvisation, simple dances with props, and watching and reading stories from classical ballets. Children should bring a healthy snack and drink for break.

#### Apprentice Ballet • Ages 6 ~ 7

AUGUST 1-5 • M-F: 9:00-12:00

Young ballet enthusiasts will explore the art of classical ballet by learning beginning ballet technique, improvisation, simple dances with props, and watching and reading stories from classical ballets. Children should bring a healthy snack and drink for break.

Workshop tuition is \$150 each week. If more than one child from a family is enrolled in a workshop, tuition will be discounted to \$125 for each child.

### Adult Open Classes

JUNE 21- AUGUST 19

Adult Beginner/Intermediate is a slower-paced class for students at the beginning or intermediate level of study. Adult Intermediate Advanced is for students who have previously studied ballet.

Adult Beginner/Intermediate

Tuesday: 6:00-7:30 PM

Adult Intermediate/Advanced

TS, TH, F: 9:30-11:00 AM

10-Class Card: \$135

Student with College ID/10-Class Card:  
\$125

### Ballet Intensives

Consult with Rose Flachs to place students in appropriate level.

#### LEVEL 2 Ballet Intensive

JULY 25-AUGUST 19

M-TH: 12:00-3:00

Monday: Ballet; Variations; Pilates

Tuesday: Modern; Ballet

Wednesday: Ballet; Variations; Jazz

Thursday: Seminar; Ballet

4wks \$475 • 3wks \$375 • 2wks \$250

1 wk \$175

#### LEVEL 3 Ballet Intensive

JULY 25-AUGUST 19 • M-F: 12:00-3:00

Monday: Ballet with pointe and boys' technique; Pilates

Tuesday: Modern; Ballet with pointe and boys' technique

Wednesday: Ballet with pointe and boys' technique; Jazz

Thursday: Seminar; Ballet with pointe and boys' technique

Friday: Ballet; Yoga

4wks \$550 • 3wks \$450 • 2wks \$300

1 wk \$200

#### LEVEL 4 Ballet Intensive

JULY 25-AUGUST 19

M-TH: 12:00-5:00 F: 12:00-3:00

Monday: Ballet; Pointe; Pilates

Tuesday: Seminar; Ballet; Pointe; Modern

Wednesday: Ballet; Pointe; Jazz

Thursday: Seminar; Ballet; Variations

Friday: Ballet; Pointe; Yoga

4wks \$600 • 3wks \$525 • 2wks \$350

1 wk \$225

NOTE: LEVEL 4 students may add Adult Tuesday, Thursday and Friday 9:30-11:00 class OR Adult Beg./Int. Tuesday 6:00-7:30 class to their schedule at no extra cost.

Register and pay in full by May 1st to receive a 10% discount.



*Emlyn Fenwick-Homstead warms up in the studio before class. Photo: Connie Flachs*

## MABETA Board

Jennifer Cannon  
Charles Flachs  
Rose Marie Flachs  
Debbie Gauthier  
Deborah Haas  
Judy Hubeny  
Cathy Johnson  
Anne Lytle  
Brittney Noble  
Navae Rodriguez  
Loran Saito  
Rosanna Wilkins  
MJ Wraga

### LEVEL 5 Ballet Intensive

JULY 25-AUGUST 19

M-TH: 9:30-5:00 F: 9:30-3:00

Unlimited Classes

4wks \$650 • 3wks \$550 • 2wks \$375

1 wk \$225

## Thank you MABETA donors!

Elizabeth & Frank Odell Family Fund of the  
Community Foundation of Collier County  
Sarah Boy  
Deborah K. Haas and Matthew R. Haas  
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Denette and Ciara Shea  
Anna Felicitas Thurmayr and  
Philip F. Gaziano  
Ruth Rootberg  
Saito Family  
Soares Family

## MAB students attend the Youth America Grand Prix Semi-finals in Torrington, CT

**Y**outh America Grand Prix (YAGP) is the world's largest student ballet scholarship competition that awards over \$250,000 annually in scholarships to leading dance schools worldwide. The competition is held annually around the world and in New York City, and is open to dance students, of all nationalities, 9-19 years old.

**Anna Lally** placed in the top twelve in the Pre-competitive division. She is invited to participate in a week-long intensive at the New York finals, March 17-23, 2011.

**Anna Lise Wilkins** placed in the top twelve in the Junior Contemporary division. She danced beautifully in the Classical division as well, and the YAGP jury saw so much potential in her that they unanimously invited her to NY. This only happens once or twice a year at the YAGP competitions. She will be competing in the New York finals March 17-23, 2011.

*Update: Anna Lise has been offered a scholarship to the Orlando Ballet School.*

**Connie Flachs**, alumna of MAB, placed in the top twelve in both the Senior Contemporary and Classical divisions and won the Grand Prix Award in the senior division. The Grand Prix Award and Youth Grand Prix Award are presented to dancers in the Senior and Junior divisions who, according to the YAGP jury panel, have exceeded all other dancers in their division in both Classical Ballet and Contemporary Dance categories. Connie will be competing in the New York finals and is invited to the new YAGP job fair! *Update: Connie made it to the final round in the Senior Division of the New York Youth American Grand Prix. She was one of the top 20 dancers in the senior women's division among dancers from Japan, China, Brazil, Spain, USA, France and others. A number of professional opportunities are emerged (she has not decided which to pursue at the time of press...stay tuned!)*

Congratulations to all!

## More MAB news!

Abby Lieberman was accepted into the Juilliard Summer Dance Intensive. The Summer Dance Intensive (July 17-August 5, 2011) is a three-week program in ballet and modern for advanced students who are dedicated, disciplined, and dance with a generosity of spirit. The program is limited to dancers who will be age 15-17 at the time of the program, and will begin their sophomore, junior, or senior year of high school in fall 2011. It is designed to give young dancers a taste of what a Juilliard dance student's life is all about: refining technique and performance, broadening understanding of various dance styles, experiencing New York City, and making friends from all over the world.

Anna Lise Wilkins received the Nathalie Krassovska Memorial Ballet Scholarship from the Dance Council of North Texas. This is an \$800 scholarship to attend any summer ballet intensive/workshop at least 100 miles from her home studio. Nathalie Krassovska was a Prima Ballerina of the Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo and Artistic Director of Ballet Jeunesse.

Liam Saito will attend the Pennsylvania Academy of Ballet's summer intensive.

## Rose and Charles on Mass Appeal

On January 21st, MAB Directors Rose and Charles Flachs appeared on 22 News' Mass Appeal to discuss the benefits of ballet for adults and children, and to give a demonstration class to hosts Ashley and Nate. See the entire segment at [http://www.wwlp.com/dpp/mass\\_appeal/leisure/the-benefits-of-ballet](http://www.wwlp.com/dpp/mass_appeal/leisure/the-benefits-of-ballet)



*Charles with the camera at the WWLP studio*



*L to R: Anna Lise Wilkins, Anna Lally, Connie Flachs  
Photo: Rose & Charles Flachs*



*Anna Lise performs a variation from Act 1 of Giselle  
Photo: VAM Productions*



*Connie receives the Grand Prix  
Photo: Rose Flachs*



*Rose warms up at the barre before teaching a demo class  
Photos: Rose & Charles Flachs*

about the art of classical ballet; promote the artistic development of students of ballet; perform ballet at schools, senior centers and community venues; offer scholarships for underprivileged and/or underfunded students interested in studying classical ballet; and educate teachers and students about the pedagogy of classical ballet.

Since the beginning, MABETA has stayed true to its mission. There have been many performances at community venues including Kate's Kitchen, Loomis Communities, the South Hadley and Holyoke public libraries and schools, the South Hadley Rotary Club, First Night Northampton, First Night Junior in Holyoke, Westfield Arts On The Green, and the Holyoke War Memorial. MABETA has also formed collaborative partnerships with local organizations such as Discover Holyoke and PassportHolyoke, and for the last three years, has been performing its historical adaptation of The Nutcracker to soldout audiences at the Wistariahurst Museum during the holiday season. More than 500 people, including volunteers, parents, dancers and audience members, came through the museum during their 2010 holiday performances.

Today the Massachusetts Academy of Ballet enrolls more than 125 students (including adults), some traveling from as far north as Greenfield and as far south as Hartford and Manchester, Connecticut. In addition to Artistic Directors Rose and Charles Flachs, the Academy faculty now includes Catherine Johnson who teaches the entire Preballet Division, Level 1, Level 2 and Adult Ballet, and Debra Vega who teaches Jazz and Tap.

Because of the Academy's level of professional training, its students are well prepared to pursue additional dance opportunities outside of the studio. In February 2011, the Academy was well represented at the Youth America Grand Prix (YAGP), the world's largest student ballet competition (for ages 9-19) which awards over \$250,000 annually in scholarships to leading dance schools worldwide. One

Academy student placed in the top twelve of the precompetitive division and another second in the top twelve of the junior contemporary division. At this same event, an academy alumna won the Grand Prix prize in the senior division for exceeding all other dancers in that division in both Classical Ballet and Contemporary Dance categories. Other alumni have gone on to perform with regional dance companies like the Connecticut Ballet, the Prometheus Dance Company, and the Pennsylvania Academy of Ballet Society, among others.

In just six years, Rose and Charles Flachs have "raised the barre," creating a professional and highly respected "destination" studio. At the Massachusetts Academy of Ballet, they teach by example, inspiring their students and the local community with their passion, perseverance and partnership.

*Alison Wood is principal of Wood Strategy+Design, and a proud observer of MAB's success over these past six years.*

### Scenes from the Studio

*In this column, Level 3 & 4 students enjoy a "buddy day" with Pre-Ballet 1 students*

*Right: MABETA members rehearse scenes from The Sleeping Beauty*

*Photos: Loran Diehl Saito*



Costumes, continued from page 2



*Arlene makes adjustments to a costume for Anna Lise Wilkins  
Photo: Charles Flachs*

Dance costumes are in a different category from theatre costumes. A dance costume needs to emphasize the good lines of the body and not interfere with movement. It must enhance both. Silk or other soft flowy materials are needed for certain choreography just as a two-way stretch material may be needed for other choreography. The choreographer may have very distinct ideas of what he/she wants. The costumer must have conversations with the choreographer and work alongside him/her to display what their aims are in the piece. Both dance and theatre costumes have similar considerations regarding lighting, mood, colors, themes, style and the like.

C: Is there a favorite costume you have made in the past that stands out in your mind?

A: I had to make a set of long silk dance dresses for a Japanese choreographer—and dye them so that from the bottom going up, they appeared to be a sunrise—shades of purple-green-gold. They were my favorite, years ago! Every few years something stands out in my mind, but it constantly changes—a set of dance dresses that resembled starry nights in velvets and silk, studded with flares of rhinestones; a dew drop tutu; a set of Coppelia costumes; a set of masks for Pinocchio; and the list goes on!

C: What was the most difficult costume you have ever been asked to make?

A: There were several that were challenges, but I enjoy a challenge! I must admit that I prefer not to work on large costumes with multiple yards of materials.

C: We know that you have worked on many costumes for our MAB school and Nutcracker performances over the years, in addition to your other costume work. Do you have any idea of how many costumes you have made all in all over your career or are they too numerous to recall?

A: I would count costumes in a performance that I was responsible for, with some volunteer sewers. I think the largest was Petrouchka, with over 100 costumes for that piece in a show which also included other pieces which I was responsible for as well. That was done after a usual Nutcracker, which had at least 100 costumes.

Usually a show had less than 75 costumes—but then multiply that by 35 years and at least two shows a year! I do know I filled an attic with rows of costumes and boxes of costumes. I did not do each and every costume by myself, but I was responsible for getting all the dancers costumed for stage. Thank goodness for parent volunteers! Now I am happy when it is less than a dozen new costumes for a show. I would add here that just because you have a costume already on hand

for a show does not mean it is usable—it has to be fit to a dancer.

Sometimes it is less work to start from scratch than to take apart an old costume and fit a new body! So while a show has no new costumes made for it, one cannot forget that those costumes in stock need to be fit and adjusted to new bodies.

C: Can you give us a ballpark figure of how long each new costume takes to make?

A: That all depends on the costume. A leotard takes one hour. A tutu from scratch takes a minimum of 25 hours and that does not include the fittings.

C: You are always such a picture of patience and composure under stressful backstage situations. What is your secret to remaining so calm and focused before and during performances which enables you to resolve any costume crisis as it occurs?

A: I was a teacher for many years, a profession that demands organization, planning, and certainly thinking ahead to prevent a crisis. As to a costume crisis—I have been through so many—experience makes it easy to anticipate what could happen and what to do if it does. For pants that have ripped open, black iron-on mending patches need to be on hand. For lipstick on a bodice, spot remover should be on hand. For lost mouse gloves, an extra pair on hand.

C: You have a wonderful way of dealing with our students. What motivates you?

A: I love the work and the dancers are marvelous to work with. They love what they are doing and I want to support that love by making them look good—giving them more confidence. If they feel they look good, I am a happy worker!

C: I suspect you are still sewing. What is your latest project?

A: A dog coat!

C: And, I might add, that is one lucky and well-dressed dog—outfitted by such an accomplished and talented costume mistress!

## 2010-2011 MABETA Members

Emlyn Fenwick-Homstead  
Angela Gauthier  
Izzy Haas  
Amalyah Leader  
Abby Lieberman  
Louisa Rader  
Liam Saito  
Anna Lise Wilkins

“Thank you for the wonderful experience that we are having at your school. My daughter, who is six years old...is in Cathy’s class and I can’t give [MAB] enough praise for the kindness, gentleness, and professionalism that Cathy and your school give.

She loves her class and teacher and I like that your school isn’t focused on body image, but rather on the fun of the dance itself, especially at this age. She moves much more gracefully in her play these days and has a lot more confidence in other areas of her life, like singing out loud.” —Lamis Jarvinen, MAB parent



Photo: Loran Diehl Saito

*Dance with the professionals*



The Massachusetts Academy of Ballet  
4 OPEN SQUARE WAY • STUDIO 403 • HOLYOKE, MA 01040 • 413.536.6200 • WWW.MASSACADEMYOFBALLET.COM