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CAPA Nutcracker - Lots of Work for a Great Show

By Sophie Braccini



Rehearsal at CAPA studio Photo Mina Lucacher

CAPA's requirements for the girls to participate are quite strict. "In order to join in the annual show, the girls have to dance in the ballet company and the performing ensemble, and take additional technique and choreography classes that are geared to the performance," says Brown. This means that the little ones, 6 to 9 years old, come at least three times a week, and girls ages 9 and up average eight to 10 hours a week.

"Then there are eight mandatory rehearsals on Sundays and dress rehearsals," says Brown.

Each age group is in charge of a particular role, like the sugar angels, the party children or the mice, and they work on their parts during their weekly classes. By the time they reach high school, the ballerinas have performed the ballet about eight times, but it is never the same.

"It changes every year," says Maddy Weinberg, a freshman at Campolindo who's been dancing at CAPA for 10 years and in *The Nutcracker* for nine, "and every year you look forward to the next level."

"It is a lot of work, but it taught me discipline," adds Weinberg. Brown agrees that their commitment to their art teaches the girls discipline and time management, and that the girls are often also at the top of their academic classes. Each year, the ballerinas also compete for one of the 17 individual roles in the ballet. There are four casts, so there are plenty of roles; still, the competition is fierce to get the favorites.

"This is intense," says Rachel Chew, CAPA ballet mistress. "The girls work very hard for these auditions; many take private lessons. They have to come to the audition knowing their role perfectly."

"We care for each other," says Mary Noal, who's also been a ballerina at CAPA for 10 years. "We know what goes on in the heads of others when they audition and how they feel, and if they get a role you wanted, then you support them."

"There is competition but there is no negativity," adds Weinberg. Even if there are tears, mean spiritedness is not a part of it. "The girls are extremely supportive of each other," says Brown. "This year 69 girls auditioned for the main parts and each of them got a role in one of the four casts - maybe not the exact one they wanted, but each they got something."

For some of the girls, dancing becomes a passion that they wish to pursue their entire lives.

Molly Longchamps is a seventh grader at Stanley Middle School who will be playing one of the Clara parts in this year's *Nutcracker*; she comes to CAPA from Walnut Creek three times a week and participates in classes at another studio the rest of the week.

"It means a lot of sore feet," she says, "because Clara has a lot of pointe work."

Longchamps is beginning to compete at the national level (Youth Grand Prix of America) and hopes to dance all her life.

"She started at Contra Costa Ballet and in the beginning she didn't like it much," says Longchamps' mother, Robin, "but especially here, Rachel (Chew) brought out the artistic expression in Molly. Now she says, 'Pointe shoes are my life.'"

Molly's mother shares in her daughter's commitment. "I live in my car," she says with a smile.

All of the CAPA parents make huge commitments to the success of the show, the first being financial. "It's on par with club sports," says Lynn Davis, whose daughter Lindsay dances four roles in the upcoming show.

Then some parents also give their time behind the scenes, or even in the production itself. Two fathers who

play Dr. Silberhaus in separate casts, love sharing time with their daughters, and being part of the show and the CAPA family.

"This is a fun thing to share with my daughter, Zoe," says Scott Heidesbach, who comes every Sunday for two and a half hours of rehearsal. Mark Weinberg started performing three years ago when his daughter played Clara. "It was wonderful to dance with my daughter," he says.

Performances can sell out. Public presentations are scheduled for Friday, Saturday and Sunday, Dec. 7, 8 and 9 in the Campolindo High School Theater. For show times and tickets, visit www.showtix4u.com.



Photo Mina Lucacher

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