

Prince George, it's OK to do ballet

By Ellen Dunkel

There's always room for a prince in ballet, whether he's the Sugar Plum Fairy's Cavalier; a man in a plotless ballet; *The Little Prince* (which BalletX recently performed); or a small child like Britain's Prince George, who finds joy in movement.

Yet, for all the people like Lisa Collins Vidnovic of the Metropolitan Ballet School in Jenkintown, who encourages boys by giving them scholarships and a safe, comfortable space to study, there are those like Lara Spencer of *Good Morning America*, who last week scoffed at George for taking ballet class.

Attitudes like Spencer's are likely born of ignorance, opinions based on twirling figures in music boxes, tutus and tights, and maybe a couple of classes long ago.

Prince George is 6. His parents say he loves ballet. His grandmother Princess Diana was patron of the English National Ballet. His family goes to ballets. He shouldn't be stifled.

Most people like to dance, and ballet teaches discipline, artistry, and fitness.

Professional dancers are no shlocks. They spend six or more hours six days a week doing the equivalent of very hard gym workouts, then perform at night. Many also cross-train, lifting weights, swimming, or taking Pilates or Gyrontonics classes.

George Balanchine famously said, "Ballet is woman." The choreographer and founder of New York City Ballet aptly noted that much of the attention is focused on the balle-

rina. Lately, there has been an extra push to get more women hired as choreographers and company directors.

But the men have also been so important. France's King Louis XIV was a passionate ballet dancer who founded the world's first company, now known as the Paris Opera Ballet.

Balanchine grew the art in the United States and helped his first

Justin Peck.

Ballet is the basis of nearly all types of dance. Nearly every Broadway musical performer has a strong ballet background, including Leslie Odom Jr., the original Aaron Burr in *Hamilton*, who studied ballet at Philadanco. All the professionals on *Dancing With the Stars*, in which Spencer competed, likely studied ballet.

And just as A-list actors start out as drama kids, dancers start out as small children at the barre.

The ballet world is making sure Spencer gets this. Many famous dancers, male and female, addressed her on social media. Ashley Boudier, a New York City Ballet principal dancer from Carlisle, Pa., said, "Prince George and his parents/family are inspirations to young boys around the world."

Wheeldon, who is British and has met several of the royals, said, "Growing up as a boy in ballet class was not easy.... It was painful, but worth every second."

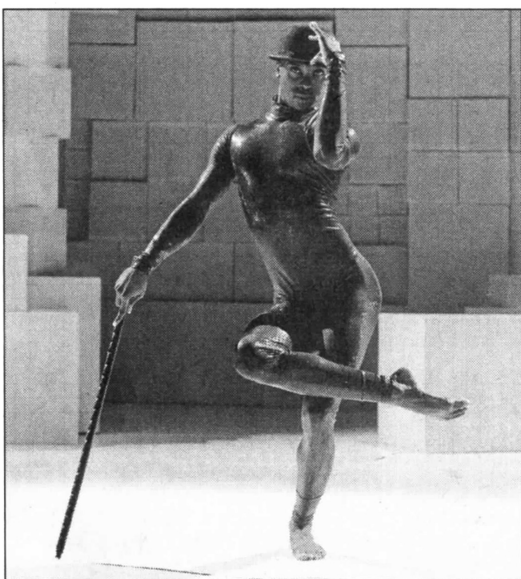
Pennsylvania Ballet responded via a video of its men, who "ignored bullies and grew up to fly like eagles here in Philadelphia."

Monday morning, professional dancers showed up outside the ABC studios, where Spencer apologized and interviewed three of them.

George is likely happily sheltered from all this, but his teachers know. And maybe next time he takes the barre, he'll feel even more welcomed.

American student, Barbara Weisberger, to start the Pennsylvania Ballet, now led by Angel Corella, who was an international star.

Ballet, and the arts in general, are better because of men like Mikhail Baryshnikov, Rudolf Nureyev, Gene Kelly, Bob Fosse, and choreographers Christopher Wheeldon, Alexei Ratmansky, and



BalletX dancer Stanley Glover as the snake in "The Little Prince." VIKKI SLOVITER

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OPINION

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Ballet good for boys

Brava to Ellen Dunkel for her Aug. 27 article about male ballet dancers, which provided both historical and international perspective. Lara Spencer of *Good Morning America* has unwittingly unleashed a torrent of interest in boys who dance and the male stars who excel at this art form. But ballet for boys does even more. While the most gifted go on to train and dance professionally with top ballet companies, most dance for the sheer fun of it: for the challenge and the camaraderie. It's their thing, just like their peers might gravitate to soccer, violin, or rock climbing. In our all-male ballet classes at the Metropolitan Ballet Academy and Company, which I founded and am artistic director of, boys build athleticism and muscles while learning life lessons in teamwork, time management, and personal responsibility. Some students with special needs have surpassed the expectations of their doctors and joyful parents. Ballet is good for boys (and girls).

✦ Lisa Collins Vidnovic, Jenkintown

Rush to judgment

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