

## Lakeville ballet school builds a reputation

The studio's second annual "Evening of Art and Dance" on Feb. 11 is among its busy schedule of dance shows.

By **LIZ ROLFSMEIER**, Special to the Star Tribune

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**Dancers at Ballet Royale practiced for an upcoming performance at Lakeville Area Art Center.**

"I saw a lot of frenetic brush strokes," Rick Vogt said of the vivid abstract painting by Jimmy Longoria. "I was picturing a lot of strings."

So he picked an unlikely piece, the first movement of Ernest Bloch's "Quintet for Piano and Strings," labeled "Agitato" ("to play in an agitated, restless style"), for his upcoming

contemporary ballet performance. He and other choreographers from Ballet Royale used visual artwork by local artists as inspiration for the "Evening of Art and Dance," scheduled for Feb. 11 at Lakeville Area Art Center.

The show is part of a varied performance calendar for the new school, which performed "The Nutcracker" with the Twin Cities Ballet and will produce a "Wizard of Oz" ballet (which includes a traveling circus, tightrope walkers and, of course, Dorothy in sparkly ballet slippers) in May.

Vogt and his wife, Denise, both former professional dancers who met while dancing in Germany, started their ballet school in 2009. Denise Vogt, who trained with England's Royal Academy of Dance, has taught ballet for 17 years. A couple of years ago, she toyed with the idea of pursuing her interest in sculpture, but a number of people approached the couple about starting a studio. According to the couple, no other area schools focus solely on ballet.

"I realized if I quit, there wasn't really anywhere for these girls," she said. "Now I'm going to sculpt girls."

Hope Hagen, 15, of Apple Valley used to attend a competition school but was drawn to Ballet Royale after an intensive summer where she practiced pieces from "Swan Lake." The competition school focused primarily on jazz, tap and musical theatre and mostly practiced ballet "just to keep technique clean," Hagen said.

"In the world of competition dance, ballet is just not as popular," Hagen said. "Some people just think ballet is boring. You just have to see the beauty of it, I guess."

Hagen said she's found the atmosphere at Ballet Royale more welcoming. "We don't allow meanness," Denise Vogt said.

The school emphasizes performances instead of competitions. Hagen said she used to spend all year perfecting a few dances for spring competitions, which is "a lot more meticulous," she said. Now, she said, she learns more, even though pieces might not be polished to perfection.

"It's a very different mentality," Denise Vogt said. "There's a different energy when it's a full production."

Some of the students' mothers have started dancing, too, in the adult classes. "They've got the bug," Denise Vogt said. "If you want to just kind of play, it's not the class for you. It's really cool because I'm seeing them improve."

Emily Short, 18, of Apple Valley had wanted to be part of "The Nutcracker" ever since she saw a poster for it when she was little. To date, she has played every part from an angel to Clara and loves having the experience of performing with professional dancers. "I get to feel their passion," she said.

"I always want to keep dance a big part of my life," she said. Next year, she plans to take a couple of college classes but will spend most of her time focusing on auditioning with companies.

"I don't know what I would do without a good ballet school," she said. "It really pushes you to be the dancer that you want to become."

"It's kind of my dream to be a professional ballerina," Hagen said. "I definitely want to dance in college and keep going as long as I can. I can't really imagine a life without dance in it. It's just a weird concept."

Liz Rolfsmeier is a Minneapolis freelance writer.

## 'AN EVENING OF ART AND DANCE'

Includes interactive discussions with the audience and complimentary coffee hour after the show:

**When:** 7:30 p.m. Friday, Feb. 11

**Where:** Lakeville Area Arts Center, 20965 Holyoke Av.

**Tickets:** \$10 for general admission

**More information:** 952-985-4640

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