



# North Star Ballet School & Company

## PARENT & STUDENT HANDBOOK

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### INTRODUCTION TO NORTH STAR BALLET

Welcome to the North Star Ballet School. In this Family Handbook you will find information that will help you understand how the School functions and take full advantage of the programs and services it offers.

The North Star Ballet School is the major educational program of the North Star Dance Foundation, a non-profit, educational organization established in 1980 to promote the art of dance in

Interior Alaska in the belief that dance is a vital part of our cultural, education and recreational experience. The Foundation is a membership organization with a board of directors elected by the membership. Anyone with interest in the Foundation may become a member by paying an annual membership fee. (See the section on Membership for more information.) The North Star Dance Foundation also administers the North Star Ballet Company, a regional, civic performing company that provides live dance performance in the Interior, performing opportunities for the recreational dancer and essential experience for the career oriented dancer. The North Star Ballet Company is closely associated with the North Star Ballet School, but is in effect an independent entity. (See the section on The North Star Ballet Company for more information.)

The North Star Ballet School admits students of any race, color, national and ethnic origin to all of the rights, privileges, programs and activities generally accorded or made available to students of the School. It does not discriminate on the basis of race, gender, color, national or ethnic origin in the administration of its educational policies, admissions policies, scholarship programs or any other school administered programs.

The North Star Ballet School offers a Creative Movement Program for children 4 – 8 years old; a graded eight-year syllabus in Classical Ballet starting at age 8; adult classes in ballet and modern dance; and a program in the Pilates Method of Body Conditioning for youth and adults. The School operates two fifteen-week semesters during the year. During the summer a six-week class session, a Creative Movement Dance Camp for children 4 to 10, and a four-week Dance Intensive for students 11 – 18 is offered. A class schedule listing all the classes offered is available in the School office.

#### **WHAT IS DANCE EDUCATION?**

"Dance education is a medium of enhancing the quality of life for children, youth and adults. Every human being has the right to move in ways that are primal, expressive, imaginative, and transformational" (Dance As Education. Reston, VA: National Dance Association.)

Dance is a way of perceiving, a body of knowledge and a personal and social experience. The act of dancing is not mindless doing, but involves exploration, focus, commitment, self-understanding and understanding others. Quality dance education beginning in early childhood and continuing through adulthood benefits the individual's body, mind and spirit and provides a means of fully perceiving the world, communicating with others and understanding the body in which we reside. Dance is important in the education of every child, regardless of whether or not a child desires a career in dance. The North Star Ballet School provides dance education through a comprehensive, sequential curriculum with highly qualified professional faculty.

#### **CREATIVE MOVEMENT PROGRAM**

The Creative Movement Program uses a core process of doing, perceiving, knowing, understanding, creating and evaluating. Activities present the uniqueness of each child in a non-competitive way while providing a full body involvement in a vigorous and enjoyable activity. The Program brings a child into contact with other children in an atmosphere of exploration that requires discipline, cooperation, and interaction. Based on natural movement targeted in a developmentally appropriate manner, the program uses basic dance concepts of tempo, level, direction, range of motion, spatial pathways and dynamics to develop critical thinking, motor skills, self awareness and perhaps most importantly creativity. These activities provide a foundation that is applicable to every aspect of a child's development. See also the Parent Question and Answer Sheet (page 9).

#### **CLASSICAL BALLET SYLLIBUS**

Ballet is a system of physical discipline that fosters strength, flexibility, control and kinetic awareness. Ballet training builds a sleek, well-defined musculature and a high degree of articulation. Ballet teaches self-discipline, respect for others and builds self-confidence. Ballet's principals of body control can

improve performance in other dance forms and in other athletic activities. Learning ballet is not only a means of acquiring good posture, agility and physical prowess – it is a means of acquiring an aesthetic sensibility, an appreciation for beauty and the hard work it takes to achieve it.

The North Star Ballet School eight-year syllabus in classical ballet provides training for the student who seeks enrichment and recreation through dance as well as the student with career aspirations. The program emphasizes a kinesthetic approach to movement through the understanding of anatomical principles and the dynamics of movement. In this way all children may learn to dance even though some body types are more suited to perform the classical vocabulary.

The progression of ballet training parallels the physical and mental development of growing children. Ballet training is begun when a child is eight years old and has the physical strength and the mental concentration to undertake its demands. During the first four years of training children develop an understanding of how the body functions to accomplish basic technical elements and establish good working habits. Children who are allowed to undertake complicated steps before they have mastered basic principals will not develop a solid foundation for future training. At the intermediate level when the student has developed musculature and specific neuro-muscular responses it is possible to accelerate the acquisition of vocabulary. At advanced levels the mastery of the vocabulary is refined and emphasis is placed on stylistic presentation of the technique.

Pointe work is introduced at the intermediate level when students have developed sufficient strength in the foot to support the weight of the body. If undertaken too soon, before the bones in the foot have ossified sufficiently, pointe work could result in physical injury. Pointe work is an extension of the ballet technique and the student must have a thorough understanding of basic technique, posture and placement before it can be successfully undertaken.

Special work for boys is introduced at the intermediate level. There is a specific vocabulary of steps for the male dancer and it is necessary to develop the strength and skill to execute this vocabulary.

At the advanced level students may undertake pas de deux or partner work which involves the male and female dancers working together in a highly coordinated fashion to create an integrated whole.

## **PILATES PROGRAM**

The North Star Ballet offers a program in the Classical Pilates Method of Body Conditioning. The system of conditioning developed by Joseph Pilates combines intense mental conditioning with physical training to produce a lean, lithe physique, proper body alignment, and balance. It teaches muscles to work in a controlled way in harmony with breath that can be applied in everyday activities and enhance performance in specific athletic activities. Based on strengthening support muscles deep within the body, the system facilitates change in neuro-muscular patterns to stabilize the spine and build flexibility and strength in the extremities. The System has two interrelated components – mat work – learning the basic Pilate's exercises and concepts; and apparatus work – an enhancement of the mat work or in some cases, a means of therapeutic exercise to address specific injuries or weaknesses. Classes are available at the beginning level (Level I) and at a more advanced level (Level II.) Apparatus work is available to North Star Ballet Company and Junior Company Members by appointment. A schedule of available times is kept in the office. Individuals who wish to use the apparatus must be pre-qualified. Information is available in the office. Training is of benefit to all individuals regardless of age or physical condition.

## **STUDENT ASSISTANT PROGRAM**

Student assistants are used in all the creative movement classes and in the first two levels of ballet. Student assistants help the teacher in managing the class and demonstrate as needed. Under the supervision of an experienced expert, student assistants gain valuable knowledge in working with young children, in the class syllabus and teaching methods. Students who have reached the C2 Level in Ballet

may apply for assistant positions. There are a limited number of positions available each semester and students are chosen on the basis of maturity, dependability and enthusiasm. Students who wish to participate in the program should contact the Director of the Creative Movement Program before the end of the semester prior to the semester they wish to be involved. Student assistants earn tuition credit based on the number of classes they assist. Students are expected to be punctual, dressed appropriately and prepared to work diligently.

### SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM

The North Star Ballet School awards a number of tuition scholarships each year. Scholarship awards are based on a student's financial need, physical suitability for ballet training or special need for ballet training. Scholarship auditions are held at the beginning of each school year. (See School Calendar for dates.) Applicants must fill out a scholarship application and provide a copy of their most recent Federal Income Tax Return. The Director of the School ascertains a student's physical suitability in the scholarship audition. The Scholarship Committee, appointed by the President of the Board of Directors of the North Star Dance Foundation, reviews a student's scholarship application and financial information. The Committee, in consultation with the Director of the School determines scholarship awards. Applications and further information are available in the office.

### CLASS SCHEDULES

Class Schedules are available in the office and include tuition rates, a calendar of important dates and general rules and regulations. The schedule is printed each semester for the regular school year and a new schedule is printed for the summer. The schedule is subject to change as classes without sufficient enrollment may be cancelled. Questions about the schedule or tuition payment should be directed to the School Registrar.

### NORTH STAR BALLET SCHOOL GENERAL RULES AND REGULATIONS

**PLACEMENT:** Students will be placed in classes that are appropriate for their level of physical and mental development. The North Star Ballet School believes strongly in the need for children to work in a challenging learning environment with others of their own age and skill. Students ages 4-7 are placed in the class appropriate to their age. Students age 8 may enroll in beginning ballet classes. Other students should arrange with the School Registrar for a placement class. This allows the teacher to assess the student's capabilities and places him or her at the appropriate level. Students advance through the program progressively. Skill and knowledge developed at a lower level is essential to success at a higher level.

**ATTENDANCE :** Classes will begin and end promptly as scheduled. It is important to be on time. Parents are requested to pick up students promptly so that waiting will not inconvenience the staff. The North Star Ballet School is only responsible for students once they are in the building. Parents are responsible their child entering and exiting the building safely. Children may not wait outside the building for pick up. Only classes missed due to illness or extenuating circumstances may be made up. Make-up classes should be scheduled with the instructor. Children must be picked up promptly at the end of their class.

**DRESS CODE :** The School maintains a dress code because it allows the faculty to see the student's body clearly. It also insures that the student is focused on the work at hand rather than on how they look in a particular costume. It is cheaper for the parents who are not faced with keeping up with the latest trends in dancewear.

- o Females: black leotard, pink tights, pink ballet shoes. Students below the B2 Level may not wear camisole leotards. A short or long sleeve, plain neck leotard is simply the most appropriate and workable. Younger students who do not have the physical development to wear a camisole leotard spend their time trying to keep it on.
- o Males: white tee shirt, black tights, black ballet shoes.

All students must have their hair securely fastened away from face with bangs pinned back to prevent the distraction. Skirts, jewelry and watches may not be worn. Students improperly attired may be denied entrance to class.

**PARENTS' WEEK:** We have found from experience that students make better progress without the distraction of observers. Because of the great influence a parent's opinion has on their child, their presence in class can be a real distraction and impede progress. Parents and friends are invited to observe classes during Parents' Week (see calendar for dates). Students are prepared for observers during Parents' Week and their presence then is of special importance to validate and reinforce progress. Special arrangements to observe classes for family members who are visiting Fairbanks may be made with the instructor.

**CLASS DEMONSTRATION:** As part of the course of instruction, students are expected to participate in the Class Demonstration at the end of the year. The demonstration is an opportunity for students to share their progress with others and to build stage presence and performance skills. The Class Demonstration provides a clear picture of the training process. Preparation for the class demonstration is done in class and it is important that students be in classes the weeks before the demonstration. The Class Demonstration involves one staging rehearsal at the theater the day before the actual demonstration. Parents are provided with a complete schedule of this rehearsal and information in plenty of time to make plans. The faculty will greatly appreciate knowing if your child cannot participate.

**CONFERENCES:** The North Star Ballet School encourages parents to schedule individual conferences with the School Director or individual teachers whenever necessary. Any problem should be brought to the attention of the School Director promptly to insure that each student's needs are addressed immediately and appropriately. Conferences should be scheduled through the School Registrar.

**CANCELLATIONS :** Any class without an enrollment of at least five students may be cancelled. The North Star Ballet School will be closed if the temperature is 50 degrees below zero or colder as verified by calling 844. Parents should use discretion in determining when other weather conditions such as ice fog influence safe travel. In this case students may schedule a make-up class. Classes cancelled because of bad weather will be rescheduled.

**TUITION:** Tuition is payable in advance at the beginning of the session. Special arrangements to pay otherwise may be made with the Registrar. Refunds will be made only in case of injury or extenuating circumstances. Requests for refunds should be addressed to the Treasurer of the North Star Dance Foundation.

**LIABILITY:** Every precaution is taken to insure the safety of each student in the classroom. The North Star Ballet School does not assume responsibility for injuries that may result from participation in classes or other activities associated with the School. Parents or students of legal age must sign a release of liability before registration will be accepted.

## THE NORTH STAR BALLET COMPANY

The North Star Ballet Company is a civic, regional performing company offering pre-professional stage experience to the career oriented dancer and performance opportunities to the recreational dancer. The Company provides arts enrichment and recreation for the Interior through two major productions, lecture-demonstrations, mini-performances and master classes during the year. The Company has three levels of membership: Senior Company, Apprentice Company and Junior Company. Auditions are held at the beginning of each season (see Class Schedule Calendar for dates). Auditions are publicly advertised and are open to any student. Students at least 13 years old may audition for the Senior and Apprentice Company, Students at least 11 years old may audition for the Junior Company. Placement in the Company is at the discretion of the Artistic Director and is based on ability, experience and enthusiasm. Company members must sign a contract for the season. The contract outlines the responsibilities of company membership and the responsibilities of the Company to the dancer. Contracts are available in the office for examination.

A major part of Company membership is commitment. Parents and potential company members should understand the contract thoroughly to avoid conflicts particularly in time commitment. Company membership is critical for the career-oriented dancer to build performing skills essential to being competitive in the field.

The North Star Ballet Company produces a full-length *Nutcracker* for the holiday season. The *Nutcracker* is a wonderful opportunity for children to be part of a large theatrical production, experience the excitement of working together to accomplish a common goal and enjoy the rewards of commitment. Auditions are held each fall for children's roles in the production. There are roles for eighty children in two separate casts. Children must have passed their eighth birthday to be eligible for the audition. Every effort is made to include as many children as possible. Roles are cast according to ability and enthusiasm, but a major consideration has to be that a child can fit into the costume for a role. If child is not cast, it does not mean that he or she did not do well in the audition. It may simply be a matter of not being the right size this year. In that case we hope parents will encourage their child to audition again the following year. The cost of producing the *Nutcracker* far exceeds ticket revenues thus a performance fee or \$30.00 is charged for each participant to help defray the costs. Parents are provided with a complete rehearsal schedule. Parents will also be expected to volunteer time in preparation for or in running the production.

## VOLUNTEER ORGANIZATION

The North Star Ballet School and the North Star Ballet Company rely heavily on volunteers to make possible its programs and services. The dedication and hard work of many volunteers are absolutely essential to the success of the organization. A spirit of community, cooperation and accomplishment has been the guiding force of volunteer activity associated with the North Star Ballet. This has been accomplished by an inclusive philosophy that recognizes the value of each individual and provides creative involvement and fulfillment for each individual. There are a great variety of tasks to be accomplished and everyone can be involved. Simply fill out a volunteer form available in the office. The Volunteer Coordinator will be in touch with you to determine your desires and availability.

## MEMBERSHIP

The North Star Dance Foundation is a membership organization. Anyone who has an interest in furthering the goals of the organization may become a member by paying an annual membership fee or by volunteering 20 (?) hours of time for the organization each year. The Membership is a vital link between the community and the Foundation and its services. The Membership elects the board members who administrate the organization at an Annual Membership meeting from a slate of

candidates proposed by the Nominating Committee, a standing committee of the Board of Directors. Nominations may also be made by the membership from the floor at the Annual Meeting provided that a letter of intent to make such nominations has been submitted to the board at least 20 days prior to the Annual Meeting to allow for notification of the Membership. We hope that you will want to be a member of the North Star Dance Foundation. Membership forms are available in the office.

## NORTH STAR BALLET FACULTY

**Norman Shelburne** is a graduate of the University of Utah and a former member of Ballet West. He has danced professionally with Atlanta's Theater Under the Stars, the National Ballet in Washington, DC, and with the Norwegian National Ballet. He received his early training from Constance Hardinge in Bristol, Virginia. His teachers have included Ann Parson, David Howard and Vera Volkova. He has served as Artistic Director of the Lexington Ballet in Lexington, Kentucky, as President of the Southeastern Regional Ballet Association and as a board member of the National Association for Regional Ballet. Mr. Shelburne has held the post of Artistic Director of the North Star Ballet since 1986. In addition he serves as Principal Teacher for the North Star Ballet School and is the Dance Director for the University of Alaska Fairbanks Summer Fine Arts Camp.

**Ruth Merriman** holds an Associate Degree in Early Childhood Development from the University of Alaska where she also studied psychology. The mother of four, Mrs. Merriman's dance background includes both ballet and other dance forms. She has been instrumental in the development of the Creative Movement Program for the North Star Ballet specializing in Creative Movement for ages 4 and 5. Mrs. Merriman's love and knowledge of children combined with a natural gift for dance make her an exceptional teacher.

**Sue Perry** received her early ballet training from George Skibine and Marjorie Tallchief in Dallas, Texas. She has danced professionally with the Pittsburgh Ballet Theater and Ruth Pages' Chicago Ballet. Ms. Perry is a former principal dancer with Ballet Metropolitan in Columbus, Ohio, and served on the faculty and as the Education Director for the Ballet Met Academy. She has taught for the Irish National Ballet, Point Park College in Pittsburgh, and the Alaska Dance Theater in Anchorage. Ms. Perry is also well versed in the art of theatrical costuming and has studied at the Columbus College of Art and Design and the Fashion Institute of Technology.

**Ann Turner**

## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

**REGULAR ATTENDANCE:** Regular attendance is critical to progress. Dance training is a progression with new information introduced with each class. In addition, the development of physical skill requires practice and is likewise accumulative. It is important that students be on time because lessons are presented in progression and important information that prepares the student's mind and body for the work is undertaken.

**BALLET SHOES:** Ballet shoes should fit snugly, but must not cramp the foot. The toes should be spread out completely within the shoe. Shoes that are too tight will hamper the ability of the foot to work properly. In shoes that are too large, the foot will slip around and be distracting. All ballet shoes must have an elastic sewn in to fit snugly across the ankle to keep the shoe on. To determine the position of the elastic, fold the back of the shoe downwards to the inside sole. The elastic should be

sewn in at the crease thus formed and at the angle of the fold. Because a child's foot is growing constantly, new shoes must be obtained periodically.

**POINTE SHOES:** When a student is ready to begin pointe work, Miss Sue will provide all the information necessary to order the shoes. Shoes are ordered from an outside distributor since there is no outlet in Fairbanks. There are a wide variety of makers and styles and shoes are selected according to the student's specific needs – the size, of course, but also the type of shank (the reinforcement within the shoe) and the vamp (how high the shoe comes up on the foot in front). It may take several tries to achieve the proper shoe. New shoes must not be worn until Miss Sue has seen the student in the shoe and approved the fit.

**INJURIES AND PHYSICAL COMPLAINTS:** A student with any physical complaint should make the instructor aware of the problem before class. The instructor will be able to determine the extent to which a complaint may affect a student's participation and make recommendations. Minor problems may mean modifying class work temporarily or undertaking rehabilitative exercise. Certain minor problems may indicate the need for a physician's attention. We recommend the services of Sportsmedicine Fairbanks because of their specific expertise and experience in treating dance injuries. This expertise includes an understanding of the specifics of ballet training and the psychological impact that injuries have on dance students.

**CAREERS IN DANCE:** The professional dance world is extremely competitive. Only a very small percentage of students taking dance classes will be able to successfully pursue a career as a professional dancer. A student's physical suitability, kinetic aptitude, musicality and expressive talents are a few of the determining factors. There are, however, a number of ways that a student with a passion for dance can find a fulfilling career and the number of opportunities is expanding as the popularity of dance increases. Teaching, dance therapy, dance injury and nutrition, history and criticism, photography are a few of these opportunities. Excellent training and performing opportunities are essential in any dance related field. At the North Star Ballet School we do not discourage any student from pursuing their aspirations of being a professional dancer. We believe it is important for a student to discover and understand their own talents and limitations and be able to make decisions accordingly. This happens quite naturally as the student matures and it is extremely important to an individual's growth and happiness to follow their passion to its logical outcome. The faculty is always ready to provide advise to parents regarding a student's potential and progress.

**THE COMPANY CALL BOARD:** The Call Board is a bulletin board next to the main entrance to the North Star Ballet School. The weekly rehearsal schedule and other important information are posted on the Call Board and this information may change from day to day as the artistic staff sees necessary. Dancers in a professional company know to check the Call Board for the rehearsal schedule daily. It is the only notification given of upcoming rehearsals. Dancers in the North Star Ballet Company and Junior Company are likewise expected to check the Call Board. We believe it is important for our dancers to assume this responsibility as part of their training. While parents are welcome to check the Call Board, it is the responsibility of each company member to know when they are to be present for rehearsal.

## Creative Movement Parent Question and Answer Sheet

**1. Question: What does my child wear to class?**

**Answer:** Girls: black leotard, pink tights, and pink ballet shoes.

Boys: white t-shirt, black tights, and black or white ballet shoes with white socks.

Please adhere to this dress code. Dance skirts, tutu's and costume type attire can be very distracting to your child as well as other students when important learning is taking place in class. Hair should be securely fastened away from face and neck. Jewelry may not be worn.

**2. Question: What can I do to prepare my child for class?**

**Answer:** Please arrive on time and please ensure that your child has had the opportunity to use the restroom prior to class.

**3. Question: Can we watch class?**

**Answer:** We have found from experience that children make better progress without the distraction of parents. Parents and friends are invited to observe classes during parents' week (See calendar for dates). If your child needs additional assurance, you are welcome to walk them into class and leave when the teacher makes them feel comfortable.

**4. Question: Is regular attendance important?**

**Answer:** Absolutely. As with any lesson, dance training is a building progression. Each class builds as new dance concepts are introduced. Please inform your instructor if your child is unable to attend for any reason. Children shall be allowed to enter the class room five (5) minutes prior to the start of class. It is important that your child arrive to class on time. The beginning of class is a vital opportunity for your child to feel part of our dance family through our warm up activities.

**5. Question: How will I know how my child is doing in class?**

**Answer:** Your child's teacher is always available to discuss your child's progress and any concerns or comments that you may have. Instructors are usually available after class. If this is not convenient, you may contact the instructor by calling the North Star Ballet School at 451-8800.

**6. Question: If my child misses class, can they attend a makeup class?**

**Answer:** To ensure the comfort of your child and to maintain a manageable class size, makeup classes are discouraged. However, if there is a family emergency or long illness the instructor will discuss a class makeup schedule with you.

