

# THE MARTHA'S VINEYARD TIMES

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## **DANCE**

### **BRINGING STUDENTS TO THEIR FEET**

BY ALEXANDRA BULLEN

On Monday morning, Chilmark School teachers led their students on the short walk along Middle Road to The Yard, where they were entertained by the antics and footwork of choreographer and long- time Yard member Carolyn Dorfman and her troupe, the Carolyn Dorfman Dance Company (CDDC).

The Yard's artistic director, Wendy Taucher, who introduced the program, led the eager students through a brief warm- up exercise, instructing them to mime a scene of eating at a table while having an animated discussion with a relative.

She then encouraged the children to watch the dancers closely, to zoom in on them with their eyes and think of their favorite moments in each piece.

And watch they did, as dancer Wendee Rogerson portrayed Ms. Dorfman's father as a very elderly man. Dressed in a trench coat, slacks, and a felt hat, she began with her back to the audience, alternately reaching up and falling down, embodying the struggle of somebody still very much alive but limited in movement by illness and age.

After the performance, Ms. Taucher had the students stand of stage and mimic Ms. Rogerson's movements.

"The message is about tradition and family," Ms. Taucher explains. "One of the wonderful things about this piece is that it demonstrates the family

dynamic in a way that makes it all familiar. It's also a way of looking at different cultures and at the same time showing the similarities between those cultures."

The New Jersey- based contemporary dance company presented a week of in- school workshops and performances across the Island, culminating in this weekend's performance of Ms. Dorfman's Mayne Mentschn (My People), at the Performing Arts Center.

Dancers Kyla Barkin and David Shen performed a piece from Mayne Mentschn called "The Arrangement," which addressed the tradition of arranged marriages, when husbands and wives met for the first time on their wedding day. The performance was lively and incorporated life- like papier- mâché masks worn by the dancers on the backs of their heads that made students shriek with delight as they were revealed.

Ms. Barkin and Mr. Shen ran through a portion of the piece without masks, so the students could see how carefully the movements had been arranged in order to emphasize the idea of expressing one emotion while experiencing another. The deconstruction of specific movements served to break down for the students the important role of a choreographer.

Ms. Taucher says, “We’re really interested in the idea of advocating an understanding of how choreographers work,” she says. “We’re doing workshops to deconstruct the pieces in front of people in our professional performances, too. It’s not just for the kids.”

Tom Werder, Executive Director of CDDC, agrees. “It’s not intuitive for an audience to access what a choreographer does, so if you open the door a little bit and let them in, it’s something they can understand and really get some deeper meaning from.”

According to Ms. ROgersdon, who has been dancing with the company for ten years, just the act of witnessing a live performance has its benefits for students: “I think it helps kids communicate better, when they’re seeing something live and human- movement based.”

Dancer Aaron Selissen, who performed a younger version of Ms. Dorfman’s father in another piece, noted the importance of dance workshops for kids as “exposure to art that’s not pop art.”

After a piece portraying a young and older version of Ms. Dorfman’s father, in which the two dancers performed a choreographed scuffle, the students were asked whom they thought the younger man was fighting. They were quick to call out, “himself!”

“It’s about the imagination,” Ms. Taucher says. “It’s really more about opening their minds so that they see something so clever like two characters playing the same guy, or the double mask piece.”

Mr. WERder, who regularly arranges for the company to hold workshops and residencies at New Jersey schools, agrees that exposing

students to dance is “a way for kids to begin to understand the power of art and the impact that it can have on them emotionally.” The program, which provides all the Island schools with the dance workshops, receives funding in art from grants from the Martha’s Vineyard Cultural Council, the Permanent Endowment Fund of Martha’s Vineyard, the Bank of Martha’s Vineyard, Martha’s Vineyard Savings Bank, and the Martha’s Vineyard Rotary Club.

Ms. Taucher explains, “The school district administration has a clear commitment to deal with cultural diversity. As an experienced art educator, I can appreciate the difficulty in balancing the Three R’s and all the other exstudents: “I think it helps kids communicate better, when they’re seeing something live and human- movement based.”

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Ms. Taucher explains, “The school district administration has a clear commitment to deal with cultural diversity. As an experienced art educator, I can appreciate the difficulty in balancing the Three R’s and all the other experiences valuable to educating children. This program is a clear demonstration of that.”