

## Dance troupe takes up residency in E.B. schools

Fifth-graders receive dance education during music classes

By Brian Donahue *Sentinel* Staff Writer

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It's one of the four arts disciplines, along with music, visual arts and theater, but most school districts choose not to include dance as an art form in their curriculum.

The concert served as an introduction to the dance residency program. They instead teach aspects of dance such as aerobics and folk dance, along with the other performing arts included in the state Core Curriculum Content Standards. East Brunswick is one of just a few school districts in New Jersey to also provide education of dance as an art form, doing so for students in fifth grade.

"People might send their kids for dance lessons on their own, but few districts had it as an educational program," said Jeffrey Lesser, supervisor of arts education for the East Brunswick Public Schools.

One reason, he said, may be a lack of teachers who are qualified and certified. Another may be that dance as an art form was typically seen as ballet, which the majority of the male student and adult population did not accept as being masculine in nature, he said.

"Of course, that is not true," Lesser said. "The perception is changing, and there are many other forms of artistic dance to be studied." East Brunswick has for the past three years been educating its fifth-grade classes in dance through a partnership with the Carolyn Dorfman Dance Company. The 10-member troupe, based in Union, takes up an annual residency with the district that includes facilitating four dance workshops during the students' regularly scheduled music classes.

This year's program kicked off last week when the dance company presented an assembly to all of East Brunswick's fifth grade students in the Performing Arts Center at Hammar skjold Middle School, Rues Lane.

"The students really saw firsthand how, like theater, music and art, dance is another means for expressing oneself or telling a story," Patricia LaDuca, director of community relations and programs for the school district, said after the Nov. 12 assembly. She made special note of the new Performing Arts Center at the recently renovated school as enabling the district to bring the students from various elementary schools together for the first time. "Not only were they able to enjoy this amazing performance in a beautiful facility, this is much more efficient and less costly than taking them to a program off site or having to bring the dance company to each school separately."

The program is the students' first exposure to a classical dance setting, Lesser said. The students are learning the aesthetics and appreciation of dance, and later on they will study the principles of dance and performance, all with the help of the Dorfman company. Its members are conducting two weeklong sessions in the elementary schools this fall and will return for three more in February and March.

"The dancers themselves are very good educators," Lesser said.

Dorfman, the group's artistic director and choreographer since founding the company in 1982, creates provocative dances that reflect her concerns about the human condition, according to the company's website. The troupe's "high-energy and technically demanding repertory uses movement as metaphor" to take audiences on journeys dealing with "spirit and passion for life, people and truth, survival and renewal."



**Dancers with the Carolyn Dorfman Dance Company perform a concert Nov. 12 for fifth-graders in the Performing Arts Center at Hammar skjold Middle School, East Brunswick. This is the third year the dance company has worked with the school district.**  
Photo by Jeff Granit, *Sentinel* Staff



**Members of the Carolyn Dorfman Dance Company perform for fifth-graders Nov. 12 in the Performing Arts Center at Hammar skjold Middle School, East Brunswick.**

Photo by Jeff Granit, *Sentinel* Staff

Last week's dance concert at Hammar skjold also included a specific theme, combining dance with Holocaust education.

Following its dance residency, the company will return to East Brunswick in April to conduct a clinic for students at East Brunswick High School, and that evening will present a dance concert at Hammar skjold's Performing Arts Center. Titled "East Brunswick Remembers," the show will serve to educate its audience on the Holocaust and genocide, as well as cultural diversity. HSBC Bank and the East Brunswick Education Foundation will cosponsor the April 7 concert. Tickets, at \$15 for adults; \$10 for students and seniors, are available by calling 732-613-6985 or by emailing [Commrel@ebnet.org](mailto:Commrel@ebnet.org).

Providing dance education, along with music, visual arts and theater, according to Lesser, is one of the reasons East Brunswick High School was named a New Jersey Model School for the Arts last year. While almost everyone participates in dance to some degree in their personal lives, he said, it is now a growing trend in education, with more school districts beginning to incorporate it into their curriculums.

"It is the next wave of the future," Lesser said.