

While attending a performance at the Kennedy Center more than a decade ago, Douglas Yeuell, executive director of Joy of Motion, noticed that he knew nearly every person in the audience. He had an epiphany: He knew them because they took dance classes at Joy of Motion. “It was then that I realized Joy of Motion’s true purpose: creating a community that dances,” he says.

Middle Eastern dance (belly dance), flamenco, floor barre, Pilates, ballroom, salsa, swing, street jam, stretch and yoga. Students can also enroll in one-day workshops in dance specialties such as Appalachian clogging and Irish hard-shoe dancing. The YouthDance Intensive program offers four levels of dance technique in ballet, tap, modern and street jam, in addition to choreography and repertory for advanced students.

Unlike many studios, however, Joy of Motion has more dance classes for adults than

for children. “Sometimes, dance is more powerful for adults,” says Yeuell. “In the studio, everyone becomes who they really are—they are no longer a lawyer or a schoolteacher, they are just themselves and they discover their true person.” Student Janet Lee, 24, calls Joy of Motion “the largest community of young adult dancers in the area.”

Judy White, a speech pathologist and grandmother from Potomac, MD, has been dancing all of her life and has been a student at Joy of Motion since it opened. As a

jumping for joy

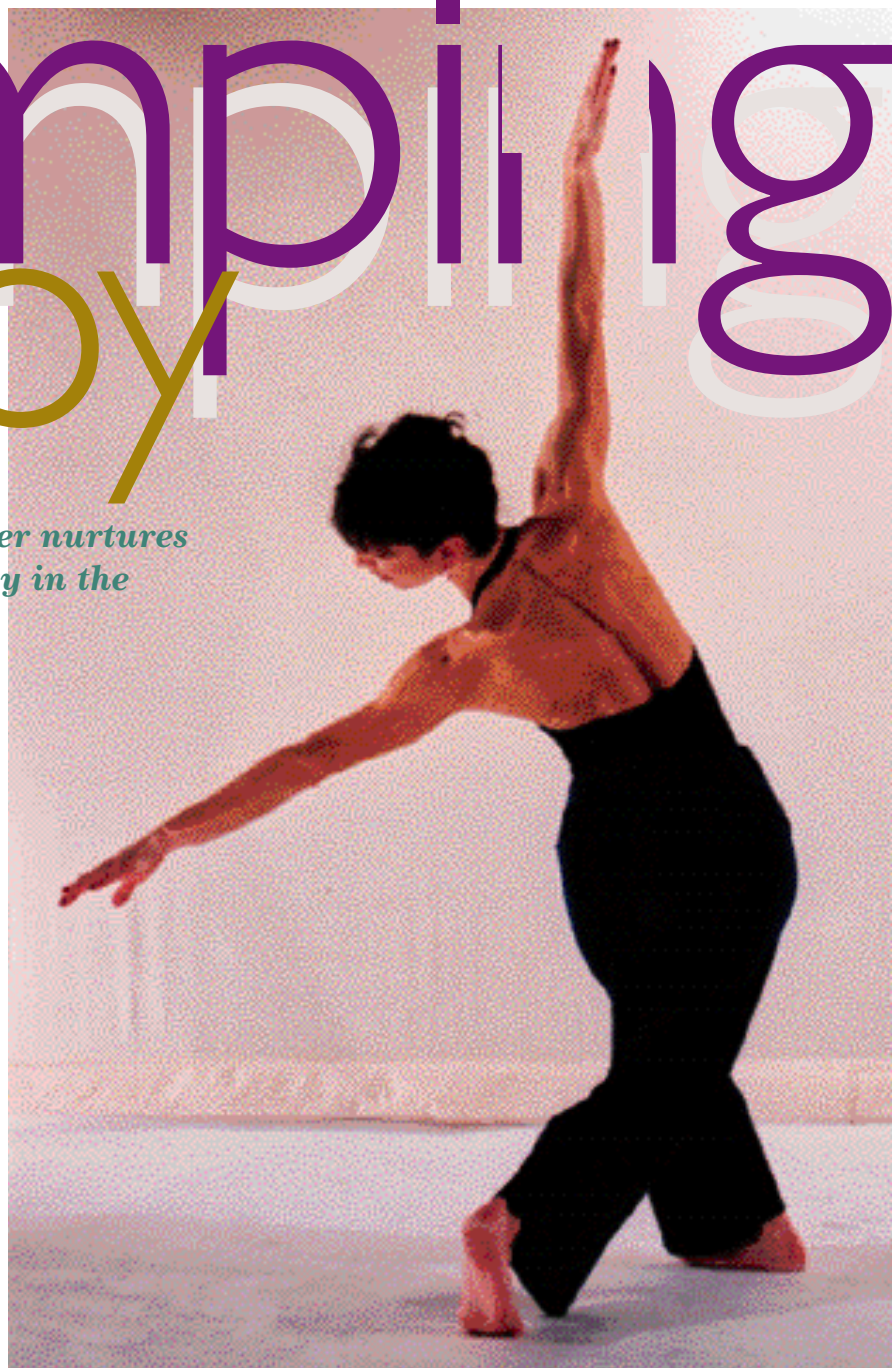
Joy of Motion Dance Center nurtures a diverse dance community in the nation’s capital.

Since its inception in 1976 under the direction of founder Michelle Ava, Joy of Motion has been creating the kind of community implied by its motto: “Dance is for everyone.” What started out as a one-studio operation has evolved into a multi-studio dance center serving more than 10,000 students, ranging in age from 3 to 80.

In the Studio

Joy of Motion began modestly in the Woodley Park area of Washington, DC. Local interest has led to phenomenal expansion over the last 25 years. In 1980, Joy of Motion moved to its current headquarters in Dupont Circle. It added a Friendship Heights location in 1991, with seven separate studios and the Jack Guidone Theater. In 2000, Joy of Motion added a third location north of the city in Bethesda, Maryland. Now, according to Yeuell, it is “one of the nation’s largest community-based dance centers.”

The studio offers more than 270 classes each week in traditional dance disciplines such as ballet, modern, jazz and tap as well as



Faculty member Helen Hayes

PAUL EMERSON



Joy of Motion performers pose at a Middle Eastern dance open house.

teenager, she was trained as a ballet dancer at the Washington School of Ballet. When she did not become a professional, White started taking jazz at Joy of Motion and has recently begun taking modern as well. “Dance is my passion,” she says. “Joy of Motion has a wonderful and friendly atmosphere in which students help each other—that’s why I’ve been coming here all these years.”

In the Community

Joy of Motion is more than a studio. Yeuell calls it “an ever-changing, ever-evolving dance organization.” One of the hallmarks of Joy of Motion’s success is a knack for listening to the needs of the community. The Middle Eastern

curriculum, for example, grew out of student interest. “All it took was listening to what the community wanted,” says Yeuell, who began offering belly dance classes after receiving numerous inquiries. Today, Joy of Motion has 23 belly dance classes each week that serve more than 400 students.

Joy of Motion broadens its commitment to the community by participating in a wide variety of outreach programs. Early Arts, an after-school program, was developed in 1999 by one of Joy of Motion’s resident companies, CityDance Ensemble. In the program, company members teach dance in schools throughout the city. With CityDance Ensemble, Joy of Motion has also collaborated with the D.C. Commission on the Arts and Humanities’ East of the River Program, which brings arts programs to the poorest district in the city. Early Arts now includes a two-week summer camp held at Joy of Motion Dance Center’s Dupont Circle location, field trips, in-studio

sessions and end-of-year performances.

Joy of Motion is also a regional center for D.A.R.E. (Drug Awareness Resistance Education) America, operated through CityDance Ensemble and Jam Crew, another resident dance company. D.A.R.E. currently runs programs for grades 5-8 in 15 schools in the mid-Atlantic region. D.A.R.E. participants have opportunities to perform within their schools, and some can also attend Joy of Motion’s summer youth program.

These outreach programs have earned the studio local recognition. In December 2002, the organization was given the Mayor’s Award for Excellence in Service to the Arts. This spring, Joy of Motion will launch its own after-school outreach program in at least three District of Columbia public schools.

Joy of Motion’s outreach service provider, Tyrone Woods, offers dance training to organizations across the region, including

HOW IT WORKS

Joy of Motion is a nonprofit organization. Much of its support comes from student tuition, but the center also receives grants from a variety of charitable foundations, government agencies and individual donors. The center saves on payroll through its work-study program, which also enables some dancers to take more classes than they otherwise could. The organization does employ 10 full-time staff members, but work-study students pick up much of the slack at the front desk during peak hours of operation.

Watch for bigger and better things from Joy of Motion in the future. Jill Roberts, chair of the board of directors, dance instructor and a D.A.R.E. America Dance Program director, says that the organization is working to ensure greater community outreach and a solid financial foothold. After all, she says, “we want to keep growing and doing good in the community.”



Resident company Ziva’s Spanish Dance Ensemble at the Joy of Motion spring 2002 concert

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The Tapping dance company performs at Joy of Motion's Jack Guidone Theater.

the Safe Haven Outreach Ministry, Inc.; Buckman House Drug Treatment Center; Sibley Plaza Inpatient Treatment Center; Foundation School of Alexandria, Virginia; Sasha Bruce Runaway House; and Largo Kettering Library—Black Dance in America.

The center contributes to several local charitable efforts as well. Joy of Motion has participated in or produced local fundraising concerts and other special events such as Dance for Life, Faces of Hope, City of Hope Workout for AIDS and the Kids Adoption Network Carnival 2002 (hosted by the Center for Adoption Support and Education).

Joy of Motion Dance Center

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In Performance

Not only is Joy of Motion a place to learn many types of dance, it is also a place to perform, with six resident performing companies that have become widely recognized in the metropolitan area: modern dance companies CityDance Ensemble, CrossCurrents Dance Company and Dana Tai Soon Burgess & Company; El Teatro de Danza Contemporanea, representing the dance traditions of El Salvador through classical, contemporary and indigenous works; Jam Crew, which fuses hip hop, jazz and modern dance; and Ziva's Spanish Dance Ensemble, a flamenco company. Joy of Motion also has two youth performing companies, JOM Jazz Company and Soles of Steel, the tap group. All perform in the Jack Guidone Theater, named for a late founding faculty member, which converts into two studios during the day. The theater also serves as a site for resident company performances as well as other uses, such as American University graduate thesis concerts.

Many students and faculty members dance with the Joy of Motion companies. Michele Morris, a former gymnast and ballroom dancer, teaches at the studio and has performed with three of its resident companies: Jam Crew, CityDance Ensemble and CrossCurrents. "We have brought in phenomenal artists," she says proudly. "The amazing thing about Joy of Motion is that there is no pretension—it's all about the love of dance." **DT**

Elaina Loveland is an editor, freelance writer and dance teacher in Alexandria, VA.