

Feeling the Beat

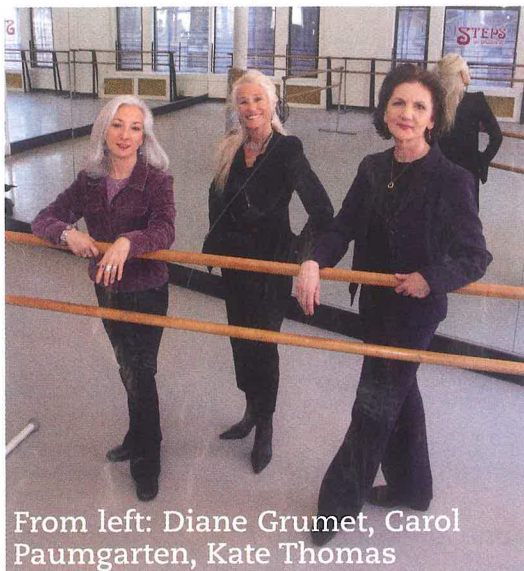
STEPS ON BROADWAY GIVES EVERYONE A CHANCE TO BE A DANCER

BY SUZANNE REISMAN

The hallway of the enormous third floor space above Fairway on the Upper West Side is pulsating with creativity. One studio is engaged in pilates, another in a thundering tap dance, and a third in classical ballet. Dancers stretch in the hallway or have a snack at the café near the entrance. The front desk is constantly busy helping people register for class. Welcome to Steps on Broadway, a unique studio in New York that trains both professional dancers, absolute beginners, and everyone in between.

Steps on Broadway was founded by Carol Paumgarten in 1979 after she took an adult class with the legendary Joyce Trisler at Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater. She never trained as a dancer, but became hooked. "I was more than excited. I wanted to do something intellectual with this," Paumgarten explains. Her first studio offered modern, jazz, and ethnic dance classes for adults. Two years later, she took over a ballet school, too. By 1984, she was able to combine the two programs, offering all styles and techniques under one roof – then a revolutionary concept – at 2121 Broadway, where they have grown ever since, now occupying three floors with 10 studios.

Paumgarten's late arrival to dance has clearly influenced the philosophy of the programs at Steps. Although primarily known for professional study, everyday at Steps over 50 classes in every skill level are available, attracting



From left: Diane Grumet, Carol Paumgarten, Kate Thomas

"a wonderful and dynamic flow of people from all walks of life," Paumgarten says. With over 115 instructors and visiting dignitaries, everyone receives dance training from a respected and experienced professional.

"We follow dance trends and the expectations of our customers and clientele very closely," explains Diane Grumet, co-artistic director and managing director. "We also have performances that bring the community together." Grumet has been dancing since she was four years old. She had a career as a ballet and contemporary dancer and taught at Alvin Ailey before joining Steps in 1994.

The School at Steps puts principle into action. "The School is tomorrow's generation of dancers," says Paumgarten with pride. Like the programs offered to adults, the School at Steps is unique in offering a wide range

of quality classes to children, explains Kate Thomas, the School's Director. To help youthful dancers achieve their dreams, the School is divided into different programs.

The Young Dancer's program is aimed at children ages two through seven and includes a range of classes. Thomas explains that Little Steps I & II, for ages two and three, are designed to initiate kids into movement and music; dance techniques are introduced to children ages four through six in pre-dance classes; and children who are six and seven years old then enroll in basic classes, which provide a solid foundation in ballet, jazz, or tap dancing.

Older kids, ages seven through 18, go onto Technique Classes, and are placed both by age and ability. Thomas understands the importance of age grouping. "Teens do not want to be in classes with ten year olds!" she laughs. Kids can explore ballet, jazz, hip hop, tap, modern technique, and musical theater. Dancers demonstrating exceptional promise may be invited into the School's pre-professional program.

Paumgarten, Grumet, and Thomas agree that Steps makes dance a part of life for anyone who wants to enjoy it. Their website is updated with workshop and class offerings regularly. From the respected instructors to the moms learning tap for the first time while their teen daughters train for a career in ballet, "there's amazing spirit at Steps," says Paumgarten. "It's energetic and infectious. We're a big family of people who work and create together." ♦