



MIKE COHEN

DANCE, FUN, ENTERTAINMENT — ONE STEP AT A TIME

I KNEW my 5-year-old granddaughter was taking dance classes. I knew she was having fun, and that at some point my presence would be required at her end-of-the-year recital.

I pictured Ciera on stage in a school gym, similar to the setting of my sister's recital so many years ago, and I figured I would be mildly entertained but very proud of my budding ballerina — and prepared to give the obligatory applause at the end of each routine.

Then my wife informed me that Ciera's recital was going to be at Chrysler Hall — at \$18 per ticket.

"Are they out of their minds?" I asked. They're having a kids' dance recital at Chrysler Hall? Surely they could come up with a less elaborate venue for a lower price.

But that shows how much I knew about the talent and capabilities of Susan Brownney and her staff at Golden Slippers Dance Academy.

What I saw last weekend was much more than your average recital. Not only was it worth every penny of the ticket price, but it was as professional a production as I have ever seen in that building.

The students ranged in age from preschool through high school, and the performances — 30 in total — offered great variety, from show tune dances to complex ballet and Broadway-style choreography.

The theme, "In Memory Of," honored performers and musicians over the years, as well as Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and Princess Diana. There were moments when we all laughed, and there were moments that brought the toughest tough guys to tears.

Emcee Joe Flanagan of WVEC-TV entertainingly portrayed Janis Joplin, Buddy Holly, Liberace, Alfred Hitchcock and Elvis, among others.

An extra treat was a number by graduates whose children are now enrolled — as well as Brownney and some of her staff. Some, the announcer said, had not been on a stage in 25 years — but one would never know that based on the caliber of the performance.

Indeed, Brownney was being modest when she called this a recital, which is somewhat like calling the Super Bowl a scrimmage. It was, in every sense of the word, a true production — complete with the music, choreography and engineering.

Having been a musician most of my life and having occupied the orchestra pit during a few amateur productions, I know the discipline and hard work it takes to prepare for a performance. It requires a dedicated staff as well as students willing to devote hours of practice and parents who will make the necessary sacrifices.

Even the youngest children were well choreographed, taking direction from their leaders in the orchestra pit. More than their skill level, which was impressive on its own, I appreciated that the kids were enjoying themselves.

With all the distractions they have these days, all the outlets for entertainment — not just TV and radio, but also video games and iPods and myriad opportunities for time on the couch — these kids are getting physical and mental stimulation. They're learning discipline. They're becoming poised and developing stage presence.

In this day and time, when we hear so much about how undisciplined our society is, it's reassuring to see so many of our young folks willing to work so hard. These kids will do well in life because they are learning at an early age what it takes — one step at a time.

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