



Meet the Artist: Leanne Mizzoni



Meet the Artist: Leanne Mizzoni

by Luke Fannin

Like many professional dancers, Leanne Mizzoni started training very young. Just five when she began under Susan Blazey at the Metropolitan Ballet School in Washington, D.C., Ms. Mizzoni gained entry to the prestigious Virginia Ballet Academy at the age of ten. There, she trained under former Ballets Russes dancers Oleg Tupine and Tania Rousseau. After training with other marquee programs like the Joffrey Ballet and Virginia Academy of Arts, she had the opportunity to join professional companies or attend a dedicated training school. But Ms. Mizzoni was interested in teaching, so she chose to pursue a college education instead. At the University of Connecticut's Hartt Academy, she earned her Bachelor of Fine Arts in dance pedagogy.

To have begun such intensive, rigorous training so young could not have been easy — and, of course, she's not claiming it was — but Ms. Mizzoni is especially grateful for the experience. "It was very intense, and my teachers were very strict," she recalls. "But that discipline is all part of a tradition, something you want to keep alive. It's special. It's a legacy. Not everyone can do it."

That legacy is something Ms. Mizzoni has worked hard to pass on to her students at Ballet Fantastique since joining in 2009. Eugene may seem an unlikely landing spot for an elite ballerina from the D.C. area, and Ms. Mizzoni would be the first to tell you that she never expected to end up here. Immediately upon graduating (cum laude) from the Hartt Academy, she joined the Manassas Ballet Theatre, where she stayed four years. In her final year with the company, Donna Marisa and Hannah Bontrager, the mother-daughter team behind Ballet Fantastique, saw her perform (Hannah was also dancing for Manassas at the time), and were quick to recruit her to their cause. "At first, I wasn't sure I wanted to



move out here," Ms. Mizzoni recalls. "Eugene is a lot different than what I was used to, and it was so far away from my family and everything I knew. But here I had this chance to help something grow, where my voice would be heard. I agreed to come out for a visit and knew as soon as I got here that I was going to do it."

She has never once regretted that decision. "Everything we've done is progressing amazingly," she says. "Especially now when so many places are struggling, we're growing every year."

As an instructor, perhaps Ms. Mizzoni's biggest contribution to Ballet Fantastique has been helping to establish and teach all of the academy's adult classes. "Out east, adult programs are a big thing for a lot of studios," she explains. "Not only do they bring in money, but they show that a studio doesn't cater just to kids." The Bontragers were quick to get on board with Ms. Mizzoni's proposal to begin an adult program, and so far it has been a success. "Adults come and they really want to work," says Ms. Mizzoni. "They're here for fitness, so they're motivated. And they're fully developed, physically and mentally, so they can handle it."



It is clear Ms. Mizzoni has a desire to be a part of something larger than herself, whether it's the great tradition of ballet or the groundbreaking, visionary movement that is Ballet Fantastique. Even as she works toward her individual aspirations as a dancer, Ms. Mizzoni remains devoted to preserving the legacy of her artform for the next generation, and at the same time making it available to those it otherwise might have passed by. Uncommon characteristics, but among the company of Ballet Fantastique, they seem to be a distinguishing feature, and doubtless can be in large part

credited with both the academy's and company's continuing success.

Ballet Fantastique offers five workshops and summer camps in the month of August, including ["Swan Lake Summer Camp"](#) (August 12 – 16) and ["Bravo I Ballet Intensive"](#) (August 5 – 23), presented in association with Create! Eugene. For more information, visit [createeugene.org](#) or [balletfantastique.org](#).