

PASSION IN



Though different studios approach dance differently, one thing unites Athens' thriving dance scene: an unwavering dedication to the art.

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When most Athenians think about their town, they may think of mighty University of Georgia football or the vibrant music scene. They probably won't think of dance. In spite of that, at studios like Dancefx and East Athens Educational Dance Center, young Athenians' passion for dance is not just alive, but thriving.

"I've met lifelong friends from dance," Dancefx dancer Josephine Thrasher, a Clarke Central High School sophomore, said. "They're the people that stuck with me my whole life. When I'm focused on school and work, I need somewhere to go to take my mind off (those things), something that makes me happy. That's what dancing is."

EAEDC dancer Tajah Thomas, a CCHS senior, has danced for 16 years, forming a similar attachment to dance with a more classical training.

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THE PROCESS



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said. "I can express so much into it and tell a story through my dancing."

Though dancers across Athens share a passion, the approach varies from studio to studio. Having seen both traditional and modern environments, Dancefx Youth Education Director Kaitlin Butcher feels dancers benefit from personal relationships between their counterparts at different studios.

"Every dancer has their highs and lows. Dancers, just like friends, weave in and out of relationships (their) entire (lives)," Butcher said. "One thing that I stress to my dancers more than anything is, 'You may not be best friends with everyone at the same time, but only you share this talent.'"

As a dancer in Athens, EAEDC Facility and Program Supervisor Nena Gilreath sees the number of dance studios in Athens as an opportunity for all types of dancers to work together to create a productive dancing community.

"It's important that people know there's vibrant dancing going on. (Athens has) all these places that people can train and study (because) we're allies. The more our community is stronger as dance artists, the more people will come here to produce," Gilreath said.

DANCE



FX

Dancefx, a dance studio located at 396 Foundry St., rejects the rigidity of the archetypal dance studio, with individuality and flair placed at the forefront of most routines.

For Dancefx Youth Education Director Kaitlin Butcher, highlighting dancer's individual talents, even in group spaces, allows dancers to learn from their peers alongside the teachers themselves.

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"Some dancers have an incredible ability to do one particular style really well. Everyone just looks at them with googly eyes and is like, 'I just want to look like you doing this style,'" Butcher said.

Seeing her fellow dancers perfecting their own skills gives Dancefx dancer Siena Avolio, an Athens Academy junior, confidence in the group as a whole.

"It's really cool to see everyone working as a team, and in the end, all of our dances (come) together, it's like all of our hard work paid off," Avolio said. "(Seeing the dances is) really satisfying. I get a sense of pride from that."

Aside from practicing in class, Butcher sees Dancefx dancers express themselves through the choreography they create for the community classes taught by the student dancers at Dancefx. These classes include Open Contemporary, taught by Josephine Thrasher, a Clarke Central High School sophomore, and Intermediate Contemporary, taught by Avolio.

"These kids have so much talent and they have so many ideas and a lot of times at studios there's no outlet for them to express themselves, their ideas and their choreography," Butcher said. "These community classes that we've started doing this year (are) a really wonderful opportunity for them to make up their own (choreography) and find their own style."

O



EAST



East Athens Educational Dance Center, a dance studio located at 390 McKinley Dr., takes a more classical approach to their dances. They also take inspiration from traditional African dance by incorporating emotion into their routines.

EAEDC dancer Tajah Thomas, a Clarke Central High School senior, feels her studio stands out in the way they incorporate African dance in their pieces.

"Dancing at East Athens, we've always done things different because most studios didn't do African dance," Thomas said. "My (old) studio did things like

other studios, but our ballet, modern, jazz, hip hop and contemporary dance are different (because) we use a lot of emotions."

Practicing these dances is valuable to EAEDC instructor Sydni Sims because it allows the students to learn about and share the history of African dance.

"So much of African American history and culture has been erased, it's important that we still learn those roots," Sims said. "At EAEDC we center Black expression and history through dance."

Facility and Program Supervisor Nena Gilreath finds the inspiration from

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ATHENS



African dance important because it allows people to tell stories they might not get to with standard ballet.

"Everybody deserves a chance to be represented, to be seen, to be in the front and not in the back and not to be a token," Gilreath said. "We all have different stories from all of the backgrounds that we come from, and sometimes people's stories aren't always celebrated or talked about, so I thought that was really important."

Gilreath believes every dancer who participates in her classes deserves to be seen.

"I will look for the student that most people won't see, I call them the dark horse. They're the person that's in the back and they're doing the work but people might not notice them because they might not be as outward in their personality," Gilreath said. "I look for those students to try to pull out their confidence and to help them understand what their superpowers are." **O**

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