

Las Cruces School of Dance and Music offers ballet, tap and much more

BY MIKE COOK
Las Cruces Bulletin

Ballet may not be traditional southwestern fare, but it's such an integral part of the Las Cruces arts scene that ballet dancers will be part of the dedication of the new downtown plaza on Sept. 17 and will perform at the Renaissance ArtsFaire Nov. 5 and 6.

The dancers are part of the Borderlands Ballet Company, a local nonprofit that rehearses at the Las Cruces School of Dance and Music, 1390 N. Main St. Founder and artistic director Monique Foster opened the school in 2011, branching out from the Academy of Ballet she opened in Alamogordo more than a decade earlier.

A native of Cloudfcroft, Foster spent 10 years in New York City as a dancer, actor and model, graduating from the American Academy of the Arts. She also is the only person in New Mexico with American Ballet Theatre certification through the ABT's Level V.

Foster now commutes between Alamogordo and Las Cruces, teaching classes several days a week in each city.

"We've been doing quite well," she said.

Foster and her husband, Marc Moffatt, a philosophy professor at the University of Texas at El Paso, own the nearly 13,000 square-foot school that includes three dance classrooms and three music classrooms. Foster and her staff teach ballet, jazz, tap and hip hop dancing, as well as piano, voice, guitar, percussion and pre-kindergarten music.



COURTESY PHOTO

Dancers from the Borderlands Ballet Company will take part in the dedication of the new downtown plaza on Sept. 17.

Most of the school's clients are children, ages three to high school. "Kids are a great clientele," Foster said. "I raised these kids, a substantial majority of her dance students are girls, but there are some boys, and more are welcome, she said.

Altogether, the school has about 200 dancers, Foster said. "I raised these kids," she said. "I've had (some of) these kids since they were three years old. I have the kids for their whole childhood and teenage years and sometimes college too," she said, having started teaching some of them when they were tiny in Alamogordo into their early years at New Mexico State University in Las Cruces.

But there are also adults learning ballet and tap dancing at the school. Professional dancer Dorinda Dercar, who has experience in theatre, television and film, will teach a monthly adult tap class at the school beginning

Sept. 12. Dercar is a member of the Rhythm Tree Tap Company in Conifer, Colorado, and lives in Boulder. She will commute to Las Cruces for monthly classes, with her teaching supplemented by other staff during the month.

The school even offers a free ballet class for boys and men ages 13 and older, Foster said. Having male dancers is important not only for the students themselves but because of the roles they play in partner dancing, like the lifts that are performed in ballet.

Dancers not only take lessons, they also perform in shows in Alamogordo and Las Cruces that are often written by Moffatt.

Foster's students will be performing a dance version (with some singing) of the "Christmas Carol" musical at NMSU in December, the weekend after the NMSU Theatre Arts Department completes its run of that musical. Fos-

ter's students also perform the "Nutcracker" every other year, along with "How the Grinch Stole Christmas."

Older students get to tour the shows in both Alamogordo and Las Cruces, while younger ones perform in whichever city they live in, she said.

Borderlands Ballet Company also performs at community events like the plaza dedication and the Renaissance ArtsFaire, as well as charity functions. School children are often bussed in to see their shows and to learn about ballet, choreography and music, Foster said.

"This is an exciting opportunity to bring professional-level ballet to southern New Mexico and El Paso," Foster said in a July news release about Borderlands Ballet auditions and performances. "As the New Mexico/Texas border region develops into a significant

southwestern cultural center, Borderlands Ballet aspires to develop into an influential resident ballet company that allows regional talent to transition into a serious dance career without simply picking up and leaving the area," she said.

"The company will begin developing its repertoire with a number of smaller productions throughout the year, culminating in its first stage production in the spring of 2017 with the premiere of its original show, 'Café de Vie, Café D'amour,'" Foster said.

"I am involved with a lot of charitable work in the community, and I believe that Borderlands can help contribute to these events as a great entertainment option," Borderland Ballet

founding board member and acting president Heather Gandy said in the July news release.

The dance and music school recently opened two new rooms and would welcome independent contractors with teaching experience, Foster said. And, Foster and Moffatt would love to find someone to open a coffee shop on the eastern side of the school, which faces Main Street. It would attract traffic passing by and could also serve parents who are waiting at the school while their children complete their dance and music classes, Foster said.

For more information, contact Foster at 525-5670 and borderlands.ballet.gmail.com. Visit borderlands-ballet.com.

Breakfast?



Mesilla Valley
Pecan Pancakes



Mesilla
Eggs Benedict



Tamed for Mexican Food & Sweets Since 1831

8am-11am
Saturday & Sunday

Located on the Plaza in
Historic Old Mesilla

575-524-3524
www.laposta-de-mesilla.com

The Hot Weekend Breakfast
Spot...Is An Old Favorite!