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# Cantabrigia



From Greenland with love  
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## Dance as sport



Ballet teacher Cosmin Marculetiu works with a student at the José Mateo Dance Theatre in Harvard Square as student Kevin Corbin works the bar.

STAFF PHOTOS BY MICHAEL MANDING

### Reviving ballet's masculine side

Intro class exclusively for men

By Chas Sisk  
CORRESPONDENT

The ballet instructor, Cosmin Marculetiu, could see the problem immediately.

Kevin Corbin, a seventh-grader from Somerville, had his right shoulder out of position. It was throwing him off balance as he pirouetted, forcing him to stick his leg out to catch himself.

Marculetiu's advice was something a golf or batting instructor might say: Keep the shoulder closed, and tuck in your chin. Kevin spun again. This time he kept his feet.

"Ballet is not only an art. It's also a sport," Marculetiu says. "You have bicycling. You have swimming. Here you have to combine everything together. Here you have a lot more, and it's a lot faster than with anything else."

This is the second summer of men's instruction at José Mateo's Ballet Theatre, the 17-year-old ballet company and school in Cambridge. The program of open classes, which meet three times a week at Mateo's studio in the Old Cambridge Baptist Church, began June 23 and will run until Friday.

The classes are among the few in the Boston area exclusively for men. But Mateo believes the program will be the start of a whole new curriculum — one that is designed specifically for adult males.

"We have to dispel the myth that ballet is effeminate," Mateo said. "The movements are, in and of themselves, abstract expressions. It's the roles that ballet establishes that are basically sexist."

Men are not the demographic one usually associates with ballet instruction. Dancers have traditionally taken up ballet as children. And, as even Mateo admits, ballet is something that most boys shun. So Mateo is trying to reach the adults instead.

"Young boys are discouraged from enjoying any activity that isn't considered macho," Mateo said.

Ballet hasn't always been seen as

feminine. When first developed during the late Renaissance, the dance was dominated by men. Its moves were borrowed from the sport of fencing, and all of the performers were men. France's Louis XIV, for instance, became known as "The Sun King" because of his penchant for dancing the part of Apollo in a popular ballet.

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Cyrus Brooks, who plans to take a ballet class, watches a dance class.

"I'm used being the only guy in the class, so seeing the guys move has been helpful. You watch the women so much, and you think, 'I should move like that.' But the way we move is different."

Stephan Genatossio



Henoch Spinola works on his form during class at the José Mateo Dance Theatre in Harvard Square.



# Ballet class teaches men dance basics

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Mateo wants to revive ballet's masculine side by getting more men interested in it. And the open classes are just the beginning. In the fall, Mateo is offering an eight-week course specifically for men who have no experience with ballet. The class, which will run from Sept. 5 to Sept. 26, will be held on Fridays from 6 to 7:30 p.m.

What is unusual about Mateo's program is that it would be for men only. In most adult ballet classes, men and women are taught together.

There are at least two advantages to teaching the men separately. One is simply logistical, said Marculetiu, a Romanian dancer who moved here 10 months ago. Eliminating the women lets the instructor focus on technical points that apply specifically to men, such as how a dancer should rise out of a bend so that he's ready to lift another person over his head.

The other is psychological. Mateo believes that men shy away from ballet instruction because they are self-conscious about their lack of experience.

"In dance, it's apparent to everyone in the room what the levels of skill are," Mateo said. "Sometimes men are apprehensive about looking less capable than the women."

This summer's open classes have attracted dancers with a wide range of experience. Attendance varies, but Kevin Corbin has been the program's youngest and least-experienced pupil. The classes were his grandmother's idea — an activity that would keep him occupied during the long, summer vacation — and he's not sure yet whether he'll continue.

The other dancers are older. Some are professionals, and at least two are members of Mateo's ballet company. They are in the class to work on their technique during the company's

summer break.

Stephen Genatossio, 21, is in the middle. He took up dance only three years ago, to fulfill his college's cultural requirement. Now he has aspirations of becoming a professional ballet dancer.

"I'm used being the only guy in the class, so seeing the guys' move has been helpful," he said. "You watch the women so much, and you think, 'I should move like that.' But the way we move is different."

On a recent Wednesday in Cambridge Baptist's old sanctuary — in which the pews had been removed and a spring floor installed — Marculetiu led four students through a series of drills.

As the men swung their legs in unison, Marculetiu sat down on the floor. He hiked up his pants leg to show the knee that he'd blown out onstage in Dresden while dancing the part of the bullfighter from "Carmen."

"See this kneecap," Marculetiu said. He flexed his thigh, causing his knee cap to dance up and down. "It's going too slow. You need to make it go fast. Pow. Pow."

Marculetiu stood up and started circling the dancers. The men lifted onto their toes and began swinging their legs again, this time a bit faster. They held their arms high in the air, the fingers pointed back down toward their heads. The dancers grimaced as they swung their legs, counting time until the next pirouette.

"[There is] a stereotype that the movements are effeminate," Mateo said. "We want to give men the opportunity to discover that ballet can be part of their vocabulary in a masculine way."

(For more information on classes, please call 617-354-7467.)