

# Boys of the Ballet

BY JESSICA MOORE

*Ask the average resident of the Roaring Fork Valley what comes to mind when they hear the word 'ballet,' and it's likely the response will involve a ballerina in a tutu and pointe shoes. Such images are certainly not misplaced. After all, famed choreographer George Balanchine himself is quoted as saying, "ballet is woman." It's easy in the midst of such perspectives to forget that men play a central role in ballet. From a developmental standpoint, dance training can be a fun and unique tool for enhancing a boy's athletic and mental growth.*



**PHOTO** Jason Smith photographs Killian, who's obviously still ready to party.

As a former professional dancer with Aspen Santa Fe Ballet, Seth DelGrasso—now an officer with the Aspen Police Department—knows very well that the skills acquired through ballet training can be a future asset regardless of one’s career path. Some of the many benefits he cites include: “a growth mind set (continually working towards improvement), mental flexibility and problem solving, teamwork, trustworthiness, reliability, self-confidence, self-discipline, attention to detail, and creativity.”

This year, DelGrasso’s own sons, Roman (age 8) and Silas (age 6), are both enrolled in beginning ballet at The School of Aspen Santa Fe Ballet. Neither child was forced into classes; both boys expressed interest, saying they wanted to be on stage in ASFB’s *The Nutcracker*. To get them to this point, DelGrasso and his wife, Brooke (also a former ASFB company member), exposed the boys to dance performances and “emphasized how beneficial body awareness and stretching through ballet [would] be for their martial arts training and skiing,” said DelGrasso. While ASFB was a natural choice given both parents’ backgrounds, DelGrasso said he was confident putting his sons in the school “thanks to the devoted and skilled faculty,” whose teaching methods are “rooted in the culture of positive childhood development through the arts.”

The majority of students who enter The School of Aspen Santa Fe Ballet will not pursue a career in dance, instead applying life lessons from the studio to their academics and future career paths. However, every once in a while a student stands out from the pack, showing the natural talent and mental fortitude necessary to become a ballet professional. David Gabriel (age 15) is one such student. After training at ASFB for three years and attending numerous summer dance intensives at noted companies such as Pacific Northwest Ballet, Gabriel received a rare full scholarship for two years of study at the prestigious Central Pennsylvania Youth Ballet. “I would never have had all of these amazing

opportunities though if it wasn’t for the training and support that I received from Aspen Santa Fe Ballet,” said Gabriel.

Since starting ballet lessons at age seven, Gabriel has become aware of the advantages of ballet training and how that training transfers into other activities. He notes that ballet uniquely “targets deep inner core, leg, and hip muscles that can be extremely helpful for seemingly simple things like holding your balance and walking correctly. If you play sports I would highly recommend trying a ballet class; we practice quick footwork, core strengthening, balance exercises, and posture.” Aside from the physical benefits, Gabriel also noticed his behavior differed from that of other boys in school. While other boys might act out and disrupt the class, he explains, “boys who do ballet don’t have that, because there is no tolerance for that type of behavior in ballet class.” The discipline learned in the ballet studio transfers directly into the classroom.

So how does one encourage their son to try out ballet? Eric Chase, on faculty at The School of ASFB, suggests having them test out one month of dance to get a feel for the classes. “Let him make the decision with an open mind. The foundation of learning how to stretch, use inner core strength, move quicker, and become a leader will stay with him and create more opportunities in anything else he chooses to do.” In an organization brimming with strong male dancers and leaders, ASFB shatters stereotypes. Regardless of whether a student sticks with ballet, Chase urges parents to bring their sons to performances to see male dancers in action. “You will leave inspired.”

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**PHOTOS** Cover / Right: David Gabriel, a former ASFB student. Bottom left: These boys and girls are having a blast at class with ASFB.