



embracing the arts

The rewards extend way beyond the studio

Hallie White sees many benefits of the arts for children. She should know: the New Orleans native—and mom to Nicholas, who turns four in December—spent her early childhood singing in the choir and taking bagpipe and piano lessons. In high school, she studied each afternoon at the prestigious New Orleans Center for Creative Arts (NOCCA). Eventually, she earned a master of arts in music (voice), and has also worked in graphic design and publishing.

“All artistic endeavors create an outlet for emotional energy that can continue to enrich a child’s life well into adulthood,” says Hallie. “Art can provide a physical, intuitive, analytical, imaginative, and fun outlet for [children’s] minds to grow. It breaks conventional barriers of thought and behavior in a way that no other type of curriculum provides.”

According to Americans for the Arts, the nation’s leading nonprofit organization for advancing the arts, states that involvement with the arts—dance, music, drama, or fine arts—helps children with critical thinking, creative problem-solving, effective communication and teamwork. Additionally, the group cites the arts for helping with creative expression and self-confidence. And a 2006 report by the Society for Research in Child Development revealed that those actively engaged in extracurricular enrichment programs as a whole demonstrate greater academic achievement, psychological adjustment, and lower rates of smoking and drug use.

choosing a program

Parents aware of the importance of arts education for their children often become overwhelmed with the choices available locally: all types of dance, including classical ballet; musical instruments; voice; theater; and fine arts. “Parents can stress out when their children are young,” says Brian Himmel, director of communications at NOCCA. “The most important thing at an early age is just to expose them to the arts. Take them to a ballet, to a museum. Let them figure out what they’re interested in.”

(Himmel adds that many parents discount dance classes for their sons, something he’d love to see change. “It takes such



strength and athleticism!”)

Don’t let your preconceived notions of your child’s talent—or apparent lack thereof—guide you toward or away from a specific activity, advises Hallie. “Fine arts classes are not just for artistic children,” she says. “I think that in choosing activities for their children, parents naturally gravitate towards the activities they excelled in during their own youth, and discount the importance of other fields.”

Early childhood and the elementary school years are a great time to explore different classes. Hallie says that she’s fortunate that music, dance and body movement, coloring, crafts, and storytelling have all been an integral part of her son’s school and daycare days. Thus far, she says, he really enjoys voice as well as rhythmic movement. He’ll begin choir rehearsals next fall at both Stuart Hall School for Boys, where he’s enrolled, and at St. Charles Avenue Presbyterian, where his family worships.

By the time students get to middle school, says Himmel, they typically have found their niche. “Kids come [to NOCCA] having both the talent and the training,” he says. “It’s really incredible.”

Since Katrina, the opportunities for art education in the City have blossomed, explains Himmel. “We’ve got some great programs in New Orleans,” he says, “new charter schools, and some other great programs.” He adds that, “if you have savvy parents, they’re actively going after the great programs. There are great opportunities, and parents are seeking them out.”

“fame,” nola-style

As students approach their high school years, if they’re passionate about their art, they can set their goals on attending NOCCA. The state’s flagship school is tuition-free to all Louisiana students who meet audition requirements. [Editor’s note: NOCCA is holding an open studio for prospective students on Nov. 7.] Students, representing more than 100 public, private and parochial schools throughout the area, attend afternoon or late afternoon classes five days a week. “We get kids who are driven, who have the passion, who work really hard,” says

Himmel. "And our faculty are equally driven."

NOCCA prides itself on getting its students into college with scholarships; typically, 80 percent of its graduates receive them. "Last year, our kids were offered eight million dollars in scholarships," says Himmel.

In previous years, the school had offered Saturday classes, attracting talented students who weren't quite sure they wanted to make the commitment to the intensely focused study of the arts that NOCCA demands. The school also offered a popular week-long summer program that drew students from all across the state. Recent state budget cuts have seen both of those programs sidelined; Himmel hopes that they'll return eventually.

Obviously, not all students who put on a tutu at age four or play the piano after school once or twice a week will go on to enroll at NOCCA or even choose to continue studying their art after a few years. And that's okay.

"Just get them into an artistic environment when they're young," says Himmel. "They might never become an artist. But they'll appreciate the arts. Maybe they'll grow up to support them. And the arts will always need patrons."

Leslie Penkunas, editor of nola baby & family, credits her bachelor of fine arts in illustration with opening doors to endless possibilities in life.

the guide

Our guide to art, dance, theatre and musical programs for children and adolescents in the greater New Orleans area. Many of these programs offer adult classes as well—it's never too late to embrace the arts!

Beckwith Guitar Systems

3701 Chateau Blvd, Kenner
885.1150

www.bgsystems.org

Providing one-half hour private instruction at the studio; ages 8 and up

College of Music and Fine Arts at Loyola University

Communications/Music Complex, Room 165,
6363 St. Charles Ave., NOLA
865.3627

www.cmfa.loyno.edu

Call for information on their prep ballet, piano, guitar, voice and violin programs.

Contemporary Arts Center New Orleans

900 Camp St., NOLA
528.3805

www.cacno.org

A great way to expose children to the arts. Featuring the Entergy KidsFree Children's Art Gallery, where admission for kids under 15 is always free.

Creative Dance & Music Studio

2175 Lapalco Blvd., Harvey
491.1674

2201 Barataria Blvd, Ste M., Marrero
390.2552

www.creativedancestudio.com

Combination dance classes for ages 18 mths – 9 yrs old. Additional classes for children, preteens and teens include tap, ballet/pointe, jazz, hip hop, acro-tumbling and lyrical. Music classes include voice, piano and guitar. Classes September- May.

Dance International

2221 Transcontinental Dr., Suite D, Metairie
885.0734

Offering traditional as well as multicultural experiences in dance, from ballet to ballroom to belly dancing. Classes Sept. – May, and summer classes are available as well. For ages three years and up.

Dancer's Only

3001 Lime Street, Metairie
304.4589

www.dancers-only.net

Eight different styles of dance taught, beginner to advanced levels, for ages 18 months up. Classes cover nine-month dance season.

Dancer's Pointe

5101 West Esplanade, Metairie
455.5975; 220.4401

www.dancers-pointe.com

14 different styles of dance taught, including hip hop for boys. Classes cover nine-month dance season.

Debby Dillehay Dance Studio

3745 Florida Avenue, Kenner
468.3368

www.debbydillehaydance.com

Classes taught include tap, ballet, jazz, hip hop, lyrical, floor gymnastics/tumbling, and mom & tot (18 months and up) classes, and preschool morning, evening and Saturday classes. Regular nine-month dance season as well as special summer camps.

Drama Kids International of New Orleans

Various locations

373.5936

www.dramakids.com

After-school creative drama education for children and young adults, offering programs

for preschoolers through age 18. Holiday and summer camps are also available.

Encore Dance Studio

1827 Hickory Ave. Suite D, Harahan
737.5977

www.encoredancing.com

Offering dance classes in tap, ballet, jazz, hip hop, and tumbling. Additionally, they have a musical theatre class which includes acting, singing and dancing. For the very young, there are parent and tot classes. Regular nine-month dance season as well as special summer camps

Gayle Galle School of Dance

5050 West Esplanade, Suite D, Metairie
400.4758

Offering a variety of classes and dance styles.

Giacobbe Academy of Dance

6925 Veterans Blvd., Metairie
889.0940

Home of the Delta Ballet Festival, the only resident professional ballet company in the state, and the New Orleans Youth Ballet, a pre-professional junior company for dancers ages 10 years and the older. Classes include classical ballet, pointe, variations, jazz, hip hop, character, stretch, and repertory. Regular nine-month dance season as well as special summer camps for dancers ages eight and older.

Hays Music Studio

1023 Adams Street, Riverbend
920.9182

Studio offering private lessons in piano, voice, violin and guitar to those age three years and up.

Helena Hosch School of Dance

4631 West Napoleon Avenue, Suite 1A,
Metairie
855.3544
www.helenahoschdance.com
Combination classes for ages two and up;
classes for older children include ballet,
gymnastics, and style. Regular dance season
as well as special summer camps and special
dance parties.

Jefferson Performing Arts Society

1118 Clearview Parkway, Metairie
885-2000
www.jpas.org
Featuring a Children's & Youth Corale, a
Youth Musical Theater, and Theater Kids! See
website for auditions and other details.

Labourdette School of Dance

3205 Ridgeland Dr, Ste. B, Metairie
835.0835
Offering a wide array of dance classes,
including ballet, jazz, hip hop, and lyrical,
ages two and up. Regular nine-month dance
season.

Louisiana Academy of Performing Arts- River Ridge School of Music

1501 Hickory Ave., Harahan
738.3050
www.laapa.com
Offering preschool classes; private lessons
for piano as well as string, brass, wind, and
percussion instruments and voice; small
group classes in guitar, piano and violin;
and ensembles. Classes are year-round with
additional summer classes available for
children ages five – 17.

Metairie School of Music

901 Veterans Memorial Blvd, Metairie
837.7731
metairiemusic.com
Offering a structured program in guitar, bass,
piano, vocals, and drums with applications
to popular songs to help keep the students'
interest. For students as young as four years
old.

Myra Mier School of Ballet

3621 Florida Avenue, Kenner
468.1231
jeffersonballettheatre.com
The official school of the Jefferson Ballet
Theatre, it is dedicated to the study of
classical ballet; students are trained in the
Vaganova (Russian) method. For students as
young as four years old. Regular nine-month
dance season.

Musikgarten

Carla Waterfield
3424 Octavia St., NOLA
210-5473
www.musikgarten.org/neworleans
Helen Myers
3412 Haring Rd., Metairie
669-5242
www.musicbyhelen.com
The Musikgarten program, focusing on
singing, dancing, storytelling and playing
musical instruments, is designed for children
from birth up to age nine, and offers a
curriculum of designed learning sequences
that repeat and build patterns to reinforce and
stimulate students. Carla accepts students
ages one – five throughout the year, space
permitting, and plans to start a keyboard
class mid-year. Helen also has a separate
piano studio for group and private lessons.

New Orleans Ballet Association

One Lee Circle, NOLA
and other locations
522.0996
www.nobadance.com
Through partnerships with the New Orleans
Recreation Department (NORD), school
systems and community organizations,
NOBA provides tuition-free, year-round
comprehensive dance programs in Orleans,
St. Bernard, and Jefferson Parishes for
youth ages 6-18 through sequential training
and ancillary activities. Call or visit the
NOBA website for locations and additional
information.

The New Orleans Center for Creative Arts

2800 Chartres, NOLA
(800) 201.4836
www.nocca.com
Regional, pre-professional arts training
center, operated by the State of Louisiana,
offering high school students intensive
instruction in dance, media arts, music
(classical, jazz, vocal), theatre arts (drama,
musical theatre, theatre design), visual arts,
and creative writing. Half-day classes, 1–4
pm; also 4–6:30 pm. Tuition-free. Admission
by audition only. Open studio for prospective
students scheduled for Nov. 7.

New Orleans Children's Chorus

5306 Canal Blvd., NOLA
833.0575; 274.9943 (cell)
www.neworleanschildrenschorus.org
The NOCC comprises the Concert Chorus,
Chamber Ensemble, Youth Chorale,
Apprentice Chorus, and Intermediate Chorus.
The Concert Chorus is the main touring
chorus of NOCC. The group also sponsors
Songbirds, a musical discovery program for
children ages five and six.

New Orleans Dance Academy

5956 Magazine Street, NOLA
899.3780
www.neworleansdanceacademy.com
Featuring a Children's Ballet, with an early
childhood division for students ages three
through six and a children's division for
students ages seven and up. Home to
the Dance Theater, a ballet company for
young dancers 10 years old and older who
perform excerpts from the "Nutcracker"
at Christmas time and original ballets by
guest choreographers in the spring. Regular
nine-month dance season, plus summer
workshops for students ages three – 16.

New Orleans School of Ballet

717 Adams St, NOLA
866.0652
Offering ballet lessons to children ages three
and older. Regular nine-month dance season,
plus summer camp for those in second grade
and above.

Carol Peebles

Uptown, NOLA
256.1588
www.carolpeebles.com
Group studio classes in life drawing and
portraiture for adults; one-on-one drawing
classes for children. Call for information.

Schramel Conservatory of Dance

900 Camp St, NOLA
210.0222
Offering ballet and modern dance classes for
children ages three and up. Regular nine-
month dance season.

Southern Rep Theatre

365 Canal Street, Canal Place Shopping
Centre, Level 3, NOLA
891.8332
www.southernrep.com
A regional professional theatre specializing
in world and regional premieres by modern
playwrights. Visit its website for information
on auditioning for roles available to children.