

Member Profile



Sue Jones & Dance Kids

The combining of a passion for ballet and biology

Dancing on a wave of music allows your spirit to soar and at the same time exposes your soul to the world! Not to dance would be to me like not speaking or having the ability to express my inner feelings. Dance crosses all boundaries in the same way music does, and I later found it to be a very powerful tool for learning that reaches children in a different way.

At 5 years of age I lived in Melbourne and my feet were turned in and my big sister was dancing, so I was sent off to ballet classes! Not a great start especially considering that my first ballet teacher was not what you would call inspirational! However, I later managed to become a teacher in the Cecchetti method of ballet.

Fast forward to the early 1970's when I was dancing in a small company called Kolobok in Melbourne. It was both exciting and very demanding as I still worked in a full time job at La Trobe University as a Research Assistant in Biological Science! Madame Berezowsky was the Artistic Director and certainly made sure everyone worked hard on their technique and quality of performance presentation.

I left Melbourne in 1974 on a 35 foot sailing boat with my husband, cruised the South Pacific for a couple of years and ended up in Townsville North Queensland. As no-one in North Queensland taught the Cecchetti method, I studied the RAD method of classical ballet with Neil Walker and became an RAD teacher.



I worked as a Research Assistant in the Marine Biology Department at James Cook University where I had a first-hand experience of the coral spawning phenomena and the research work being carried out on Tropical Rainforests. I even did a stint as a Deck Hand on the university research boat the James Kirby. This wonderful experience of the Great Barrier Reef and Tropical Rainforests was my inspiration for future theatre productions.

After moving off our sailing boat, we made Magnetic Island our

home for the next 20 years. I gave up my full time work at the university to raise our two daughters Julia and Felicity. Not one for sitting still, I opened a ballet school on Magnetic Island and later another branch in Townsville. Teaching on Magnetic Island was an absolutely inspirational experience! The kids would turn up for class in their bathers and run out of the hall during class to enjoy the first rains of the wet season. They were not inhibited by what people might think of them and were very ready to try anything new.

As a teacher there is nothing like seeing the joy of young children as they feel the music and dance in a totally natural and uninhibited way. As ballet teachers I believe it is our responsibility to give young children that freedom to express themselves through dance, develop the love for dance and watch how their natural abilities blossom! Sure, technique is a vital part of learning ballet, but let's not kill off that natural desire to dance before it has even got off the ground!!

Teaching in North Queensland was one of the most inspiring times of my career and the sponsored production I produced on the life cycle of corals called Polyp would have to be the pinnacle of my career. Children from many dance schools in Townsville came together to tell this story against a backdrop of the myriad of life on the Great Barrier Reef.

We had a wonderful new theatre in Townsville to perform in and the best lighting, set builders and set artists you could imagine. The voiceover presented the story in a poetic form and was very moving yet factual. What a performance; 5 performances in a week at the Townsville Civic Theatre (TCC). The final performance was attended by delegates from the International Association for Environmental Protection of Nature. The representative from Kenya said to me at the after party; this is a biology lesson in the most entertaining way - will you come to Kenya? Following Polyp I was asked to develop a theatre production about Tropical Rainforests by Wet Tropics Management. *Rainforest Rhapsody* was presented in the TCC the next year.



Through these productions I understood what a powerful tool dance and theatre can be to educate people both young and old about our natural environment. This is how the idea of DanceKids was born.

I have always had a passion for ballet and biology and an absolute love and respect for Nature. This combination has inspired me to use dance and my

theatrical skills to create those 'moments of wonder' in people of all ages about the natural world. With this background I have felt an added responsibility to not only impart the joy of dance to children but to create a kinaesthetic pathway of learning. Many children just can't sit still, this teaching method provides them with a very interactive way of 'doing' rather than just 'hearing' and 'seeing'.

Here is a very touching email I received from a parent of a pre-school child I have been involved with throughout 2012;

"As I mentioned, my son has a language delay and has been in a Curtin Language Intervention Unit for the last two years. I believe your dance programme has strongly benefited my son. He has learnt so much and comes home talking about jellyfish and sharks and Antarctica plus dorsal fins and all sorts of science concepts that have TRULY stuck in his head. For kids with language problems (or in fact any sort of learning problem), they need multiple ways to learn. So just "seeing" or just "hearing" isn't going to be enough. Your dance programme has the kids "doing" along with "seeing" and "hearing" and that maximises the chances of learning. I believe your programme has a vital place in special education units along with mainstream schools."

This year my aim is to develop Creative Classroom Kits that will enable teachers across Australia to do what we do without us.