



## A Child-Centered Approach to Dance

### *Dance with Miss Alice glides into Brentwood*

BY ALINA GONZAQUE | PHOTOS COURTESY OF DANCE WITH MISS ALICE



At the time of our interview, Alice FitzGerald is getting ready for an event at the library: a *Nutcracker* story dance for kids. As a kid performer for all L.A. public libraries, she is often at events like this

one. Her costumed character is a Princess Ballerina — strong and feminine. Once a professional dancer back home in Australia, Alice now teaches children aged 1½ to 9. “I started teaching kids when I was a teen and in my 20s I was inspired to go back to school and get my degree in education at the University of Melbourne, adding a year of study at the University of British Columbia.” Alice taught dance in Australia and Canada before moving to L.A., where she didn’t know anyone. She started a class with a friend of a friend; and her teaching services grew from there. Her mission to create a fresh approach to dance education includes birthday parties, events, camps and classes.

Alice has been teaching dance in the States and abroad for 17 years now. Her school, Dance with Miss Alice, has burgeoned: three locations, multiple teachers, with dance and yoga programs in a number of preschools around L.A. Currently the Brentwood location

offers classes Monday through Wednesday, featuring Enchanted Ballet and Hip Hop/Jazz. The students have the opportunity to perform at least three times a year.

The curriculum for each class is designed by Alice herself, who is a licensed educator, and aims for what she calls a “holistic approach to dance.” Dance with Miss Alice, like traditional dance schools, teaches proper technique, but Alice has made it more child-centered. She explains, “We give kids as many educational opportunities while they dance as possible — integrating stories, numbers, colors — and making connections between words and emotions. The mindset is centered around growth and achieving a whole, interactive experience.” Then she confides, “I enjoy the fact that this business gives me the opportunity to combine dance and education.”

For Alice, dance has become a medium through which she can accomplish a larger goal for the children she teaches. “The children are able to make a really positive connection with themselves through dance. We say positive affirmations at the start and end of class. We’re vigilant about teaching positive experiences around dance and body image.” For instance, if one of the teachers has a weak leg, she’ll say, “Oh that’s my funny leg,” instead of “That’s my bad leg.” Alice continues, “I feel very passionate particularly about wanting young girls to feel empowered within themselves. If we keep instilling and reinforcing that they are great, capable, excel-



lent, beautiful, they can carry that knowledge on throughout life and every adversity. I want that message somewhere inside them, and they can know — from a young age — what that feels like.”

An avid nature-lover and traveler, Alice has found that yoga helps her to maintain that feeling of empowerment within herself. Not surprisingly, it now informs class curriculum as well. “I think yoga really helped me become a better dancer and person. It transformed the way I looked at movement and breath, and it changed how I saw myself as a dancer. I’ve integrated that in how I’ve developed the curriculum we use.” All the classes intend to empower, enchant, and inspire a love of all things dance. Children are reminded often to, as Alice loves to say, “find your inner star.”