

A guide to choosing a dance teacher

A dilemma facing every intending student or parent is the vexed question of how to choose a dance teacher. We are frequently asked if we can recommend a teacher. This is a deceptively simple question, the answer to which is quite complex.

Firstly, it should be recognised that at this time there is no Government regulation requiring a dance teacher to have any qualifications. Anyone can open a dance studio and commence teaching.

Which dance discipline or style is of interest to you

The most popular styles at the moment are Classical Ballet, Jazz, Theatrical Dance, Tap, Highland Dance and Ballroom Dancing. There are other more esoteric styles of dance taught such as Folk, National and Belly Dancing.

What is your objective?

You may wish to become involved in dance as a purely recreational pastime or as a vocation leading to performing or teaching.

Competitions, examinations or something else?

Broadly speaking, people become involved in dance to either compete in competitions and eisteddfods or to sit for examinations or in some cases, simply as a hobby seeking only the satisfaction of becoming involved in the joy of dance.

What qualifications should a teacher hold?

Whilst one could argue that it is impossible to pass on knowledge if one has not gained structured qualifications, it is certainly true that many excellent teachers have chosen a different path in gaining the necessary knowledge and experience to become good teachers.

What is a good teacher?

We believe that teachers regardless of whether teaching the competition stream or preparing candidates for examination should provide enjoyment, encouragement, education and expression through dance. Children particularly should enjoy learning to dance beyond just moving to music. We believe that a pupil who is stimulated will learn more readily and perform better. Whether in class, in an examination or on stage it is important to encourage pupils to give of their best to the level of their own ability without being seen to be in competition with unrealistic standards.

Some questions to ask of the intending teacher

What qualifications do you and/or your teachers hold?

Which styles of dance do you teach?

Which age groups do you teach?

Do you specialise in teaching competition work or preparing candidates for examinations or both?

What opportunities do your students have to perform?

Some teachers have end of year concerts, others encourage pupils to appear in displays or maybe stage productions or to seek work in film and TV commercials.

Which syllabus organisation or examination body do you use?

There are a number of dance syllabus organisations conducting examinations in Australia. Some of these are English in origin and have then established their own identities here. Others have commenced in Australia. Some are confined to just one state, others examine throughout Australia and in the case of the C.S.T.D. throughout Australia and internationally. Some of these bodies only conduct examinations in 1 or 2 dance disciplines.

What are the benefits of examinations?

For a teacher to become a member of an examining organisation, they meet specified levels of training. The members are provided with a structured curriculum that allows for progressive mastery of technique and which should help them keep up with current trends. Many organisations hold regular seminars for teachers as well as extra curricular events such as competitions or awards for the stimulation and improvement of their pupils.

Examinations conducted by the organisation provide an externally assessed indicator of the pupils aptitude and level of advancement. This also provides a level for the pupil to aim for.

What is the teacher's success rate?

Most teachers are happy to share with you their results gained in examinations and/or competitions and this can be one indicator of their effectiveness as a teacher.

Is it possible to talk with other parents?

Many teachers are happy for you to talk with parents of other students and some will, upon arrangement, allow you to view one of their teaching classes.

Other considerations

Naturally things like what fees are charged, the appearance and suitability of the premises, the location, the times of tuition and whether or not the teacher carries appropriate public liability and professional indemnity insurance are important issues.

In conclusion

Remember that when you are seeking to choose a dance teacher, you are the consumer but you have the responsibility to do your research and make sure that the services offered by the teacher are appropriate to your needs.

Do not be afraid to ask questions and discuss your needs frankly, and once your tuition has started if you have a problem, communicate with the teacher and/or studio principal but remember that not every aspiring ballet dancing will achieve stardom and not every dancer will make it to the world stage.

Further Information

For information about the C.S.T.D., our examination system and the contact numbers for organisers in each state, please check our website on www.comdance.asn.au. You should contact the exam organiser in your state and ask them for contact numbers for teachers in your area and discuss your needs with one or more of these teachers.