

First Day Festivities Highlight 50th Anniversary



The Miller Marley Saturday crew poses before the first day of classes on September 8th to kick off Miller Marley's 50th Anniversary. (L to R) Ann McCroskey, Jill Hochman, Missy Belt, Shirley Marley, Brian McGinness, Annie Paglusch, Christine Rouse and Laura Branson

Saturday, September 8th, was not only the first day of classes but also the start of Miller Marley's 50th Anniversary. In honor of the occasion, the entire staff received commemorative t-shirts and every student was given a red dance bag with the 50-Year logo printed on the back.

The students in Ann McCroskey's Saturday Preschool One class (pictured below) celebrated their first dance class and a new generation of little dancers for Miller Marley.



MILLER MARLEY FEATURED IN LOCAL AND NATIONAL PUBLICATIONS

Miller Marley parent, Laura Mack, is more than just a mother to Kaitlin and Kara. She also works part-time as a writer for the local magazine, *Simply KC*. This summer, Laura interviewed Shirley Marley and Brian McGinness for an article she penned on the studio's 50th Anniversary. The article is published in the September 2012 edition of *Simply KC* and a link to it can be found in the "About Us" page on the Miller Marley website. Thank you, Laura, for doing such a beautiful job!

Brian McGinness has been a long time fan of the national publication, *Dance Studio Life*. Two years ago, Brian had the opportunity to meet the publisher, Rhee Gold, at a conference in Arizona, sponsored by the Dance Life organization. Gold was so impressed with Brian's knowledge of stage design and technical elements that he had a journalist (from the magazine) contact Brian for an interview. The article appeared in the October 2012 edition of *Dance Studio Life*. You can pick up a copy in the studio office

or access it by going to the magazine's website at dancestudiolife.com

A link to the article will be posted on the Miller Marley website in the near future.

Shirley Marley also was interviewed by the Overland Park publication, *435 South*. The article is in the November 2012 issue of the magazine. A link to the article can be found in the "About Us" page on the Miller Marley website. (read more on page 4 of newsletter)

50 Years of Holiday Tradition

And the History of *Clara's Dream*

Ever since 2005, when *Clara's Dream* first appeared on the horizon, Miller Marley has designated this event as a holiday tradition at the school. Looking back, the journey that led to the creation of *Clara's Dream* spanned many years and the route took many twists and turns to deliver us to where we are today. Recently, Shirley Marley and Brian McGinness shared their holiday memories - the springboard for the stories that provide a precious link to our past.

Shirley Marley has always held fast to tradition, especially when it comes to Christmas. "Celebrating the holiday season with my extended dance family is definitely the highlight of the year for me," said Shirley. The tradition of celebrating the holiday as a school began back in the late 1960's when Shirley began hosting an annual Christmas Eve party at her apartment. When the close quarters in Shirley's apartment could no longer accommodate the expanding guest list, the parties moved to the clubhouse. This was prompted by an incident that occurred one year when due to the crowded conditions, a guest inadvertently knocked over Shirley's Christmas tree.

In the 1980's, Shirley and Brian made the decision to include a performance with the Christmas party. These began as informal gatherings during which the dance classes performed their Christmas dances in a party room at the Ranchmart Shopping Center, where Miller Marley was located at the time.

Over the next twenty years the holiday celebrations grew increasingly more ambitious and moved to large multipurpose areas first at Nativity School and then, St. Thomas Aquinas High School. Miller Marley's performance companies (formerly called troupes) were the featured entertainment and audience members (totaling over 200) were seated at large round tables. These events were a testament to the Miller Marley families and staff who collectively put their whole heart and soul into making each celebration a festive and memorable occasion.

In 1997, the Miller Marley Youth Ballet Company was formed under the artistic direction of Alecia Good. Four years later (December 2001) *Winterdance*, a holiday concert, premiered at Yardley Hall, Johnson County Community College. The first act consisted of original ballets by guest choreographers and during the second act the company performed excerpts from the *Nutcracker*. *Winterdance* continued through December 2004.

When Laura Branson (nee Skidmore) pulled up stakes and moved all the way from L.A. to Overland Park, KS (summer 2005) to become the new Artistic Director of the MMYB, she had no idea what was in store for her. Little did she know that she was soon to become a major player in the birth of a new ground-breaking holiday tradition at Miller Marley - *Clara's Dream*.

Brian's mission at the time was twofold: To upgrade the quality of the holiday performance and to discover a way to attract large crowds. The solution was obvious: Everybody loves the *Nutcracker*.

Of the project Brian said, "I wanted to create an original family-friendly interpretation (of the *Nutcracker*) without the battle scene and shorten the production to accommodate the attention span of young children." Hundreds of versions of the holiday classic have been staged, some based on E.T.A. Hoffman's original story, *The Nutcracker and the Mouse King*, and others where artistic license is taken with the characters and choreography. The title, *Clara's Dream*, is often used when the ballet is an adaptation of *The Nutcracker*.

Miller Marley's first *Clara's Dream* team in 2005 was comprised of Brian McGinness, Laura Skidmore and former ballet instructor, Matthew Donnell. No strangers to *The Nutcracker*, all three had extensive experience with the ballet, having played many roles during their respective dance careers. Both Matthew and Brian are former members of the KC Ballet.

Of Matthew Donnell's work, Brian said, "I will always be indebted to Matthew for taking my vision and turning it into a reality. Not only did he create the choreography but also, he wrote the beautiful story titled *Clara's Dream - Her Magical Journey*." Brian served as the production coordinator and Laura directed and staged the ballet.

Clara's Dream is set to Tchaikovsky's timeless music and follows a little girl named Clara who has a dream in which the Christmas toys and her beloved doll, the Nutcracker, magically come to life and lead her on a journey into an enchanted winter wonderland.

Putting on a production of this caliber was no small undertaking. Not to mention that *Clara's Dream* was a totally new endeavor for Miller Marley. In addition to this, Brian was praying for a solution to the dilemma posed by the fact that there were no costumes. Thanks to Van and Susie Ibsen (Ibsen Dance Theatre) Brian's prayers were answered. "Our good friends, the Ibsens, loaned us their entire *Nutcracker* wardrobe and we are eternally grateful for their generosity."

Clara's Dream was presented in the Performing Arts Center at Olathe East High School the weekend of December 17 and 18, 2005. As is still the custom, the performing companies were featured in Act I followed by the ballet in Act II. The show, which was double cast, consisted of around forty members and included twenty guest performers from the studio who were added to fill additional roles. In the last several years the cast has grown to over ninety performers and Blue Valley North High School has been the venue for the production.

Great anticipation had been building not only among the cast but also amidst the Miller Marley families who anxiously awaited the first performance.

The premiere of *Clara's Dream* was a huge success and really put the Miller Marley Youth Ballet on the map as a first-rate ballet company. The birth of *Clara's Dream* was a labour of love and definitely a cause for celebration - a new tradition had been born.

As Miller Marley embarks upon its eighth season of *Clara's Dream* it is with "hope" that our holiday traditions will continue, "nostalgia" for our holiday traditions of the past and "appreciation" for all our holiday traditions that have survived the test of time.



The Changing Face of Clara's Dream

As the old saying goes, "If it works, don't fix it." But where *Clara's Dream* is concerned, raising the barre without compromising the integrity of the production breathes new life into the show and keeps it fresh.

Probably the greatest enhancement to the production came in 2008 with the inclusion of Elaine Biggs as the MMYB Resident Costume Designer. Along with a master's degree in fashion, Elaine studied at the famous Chambre Syndicale de la Haute Couture in Paris, France. Her painstaking efforts to ensure historical accuracy and include every detail and embellishment have produced an awe-inspiring costume collection - especially the wardrobe for the international party scene.

Traditionally, as the story of *Clara's Dream* begins, it is Christmas Eve and Clara's parents are hosting a huge gala where all the guests are clad in their finest Victorian attire. In 2010, the party scene took on an international flair. All the party guests were foreign ambassadors and their families, dressed in costumes appropriate to their countries of origin. Brian McGinness danced this version (of the party scene) as a member of the KC Ballet and recreated it with Laura Branson for *Clara's Dream*.



Two productions of our *Clara's Dream* productions included the character, Mother Ginger and the others, just the Gingerbread children. Though Miller Marley has done a modified version of the character, traditionally, Mother Ginger is a giant clown-like woman who wears an enormous two story skirt that conceals the stilts on which she walks. When she enters, she appears to be searching for her lost children, who one-by-one emerge from under her skirt. Shirley Marley has often remarked that Mother Ginger is her favorite character. Though Shirley makes it a point not to interfere with the artistic decisions of her staff, this year she became the mouse that roared when she proclaimed, "I want Mother Ginger back!" And so it shall be. Brian reimagined the Mother Ginger role, reminiscent of the version he created for Todd Bolender, former Artistic Director of the KC Ballet. Victoria Flickner has been cast in the role and will stand on a rolling platform, instead of stilts. However, the piece de resistance will be Mother Ginger's dress which Elaine Biggs has designed to resemble a gingerbread house.

Matthew Creates a Masterpiece



Matthew Donnell
matthewdonnell.com

Clara's Dream is the brainchild of Miller Marley's former instructor and longtime friend, Matthew Donnell. Matthew currently resides in NYC, but checks in every year when *Clara's Dream* rolls around. In a recent phone conversation with Brian McGinness, Matthew said, "I can't believe that after eight years you're still doing *Clara's Dream*." Brian replied, "Are you kidding? We're gonna be doing it for the next eighty years!"

Patricia Lu Fulfills a Dream



Patricia Lu

Many students who have been guest performers in *Clara's Dream* agree that once is just not enough and return each year for the sheer joy of rejoining the cast and celebrating what has become one of their favorite holiday traditions.

14 year-old Patricia Lu was privileged to be one of the original angels in the first production of *Clara's Dream* in 2005. "I was so excited to be included and to wear the beautiful angel costume. I remember looking up to the older girls in the ballet company and wishing that one day I could be like them. If you had told me (back then) that one day I would actually be a member of the ballet company, I wouldn't have believed it. But now, here I am in my fourth production of *Clara's Dream* and third year with the MMYB. It's a dream come true.

It's Cool to be Clara

When auditions for *Clara's Dream* are announced, this creates great excitement at the dancing school, especially among all the girls vying for the coveted role of Clara. Sisters, Kelsey and Crosby Cooper, had the distinction of being the original Claras in the first production in 2005. Kelsey served as the cover girl for the program that year and for several years thereafter. Coincidentally, two other sets of sisters have played Clara: Olivia and Genevieve Austin and Alli and Megan McConnell. Megan serves as the current cover girl. This year Clara will be played by Emma Andersen and Tristan Rios.



(pictured above in photo left) Kelsey Cooper as she appeared as the cover girl for *Clara's Dream*. (photo right) The Crosby sisters, Kelsey and Crosby at around 5 years-old perform in a Miller Marley holiday performance circa 1998.



Celebrate 50 Years of Holiday Tradition

Clara's Dream - Saturday & Sunday December 1 & 2 - Blue Valley North High School
Performances at 2pm and 7pm each day - Tickets \$10



Kids On Stage

● ● ● in Kansas City

Congratulations to the Miller Marley students who are appearing in the following professional theater productions during the holiday season.

Note: *Shrek*, *Nun-crackers* and *A Christmas Carol* are double cast.

Please consult local theaters for the dates and times the children are scheduled to perform.

The Coterie Theatre - Shrek the Musical Oct. 30 - Nov. 18

Megan Secrest - *Young Fiona, Baby Bear and Duloc*

American Heartland Theatre - Nun-crackers Nov. 2 - Dec. 23

Lindsey Hart / Journey Tupper (*Louise*), **Michelle Maddock / Amanda Dulny** (*Maria*), **Brendan Hulla / Lucas Dorrell** (*Billy*)

KC Repertory Theatre - A Christmas Carol Nov. 16 - Dec. 26

Lauren Chandler / Erin Lowe (*Ignorance*), **Megan Walstrom** (*Want*), **Connor Clary** (*Ensemble*), **Mia Vaught** (*Ensemble*)

Musical Theater Heritage - A Spectacular Christmas Dec. 6 - 23

Willa Walberg (*featured soloist*)

They're Going Down in History

Recently, Shirley Marley and Brian McGinness were interviewed for the *Dance On: with Billie Mahoney* public access television series that airs on UMKC cable channel 17, KHEN. The host of the show, Billie Mahoney, is a Kansas City native and internationally acclaimed tap dancer and dance historian.

Mahoney originated and produced the cable television series, *Dance On*, "a show about people who dance," in New York, City where the show aired from 1980-1995. The more than 250 half hour television interviews highlighted the careers of distinguished dance artists from every genre. Currently, the show is produced in Kansas City at the Todd Bolender Center under the auspices of UMKC.

When Mahoney became aware of Miller Marley's 50th Anniversary she contacted Shirley to set up an interview for the *Dance On* series and subsequently set up an additional interview with Brian McGinness.

Prior to their interviews Shirley and Brian confessed to having some anxiety about being on camera. Afterward, both expressed that Mahoney's ability to connect with and establish a comfortable rapport with her guests immediately put them at ease. It even became apparent that Mahoney has Barbara Walters's knack for tapping into people's emotions. Brian said, "When I was trying to put into words what a privilege it is for me to take care of Shirley Marley, Billie's eyes and mine welled up with tears."

All interviews in the *Dance On* series are archived in The Dance Collection of the New York Public Library in Lincoln Center. The Theatre on Film and Tape Archive functions as a resource center and deals in the preservation of "live theatrical productions and documents the creative contributions of distinguished artists and legendary figures of the theatre."

What an honor it is for Shirley Marley and Brian McGinness to be sharing space in the vault with the likes of Rudolph Nureyev and Gregory Hines.

Put On Your Dancing Shoes, Shirley



Everyone who loves the musical, *42nd Street*, knows the familiar quote, "Get out your tap shoes, Francis, Julian Marsh is putting on a show." Everyone who loves Shirley Marley knows that she has never needed any encouragement to put on her tap shoes. Even at 76 years-old, she puts them on every day and teaches tap classes, jam packed with kids who just can't get enough of her inimitable style. The photo above was taken by *435 South* magazine and accompanied a fabulous article about Shirley written by Kim Antisdell titled, "Put On Your Dancing Shoes" in the November issue of *435 South* magazine.

Important Dates

Monday, November 19 - Sunday, November 25

Thanksgiving Break - No Classes will be held

Saturday, December 1

Winter Quarter Begins - Tuition Due

Saturday & Sunday, Dec. 1 & 2

Clara's Dream - 2pm & 7pm - Blue Valley North HS

Saturday December 22 - Thursday, January 3

Winter Break - No Classes will be held

Friday, January 4

Winter Quarter Classes Resume

Parent Watch Week Schedule

Watch Week #1

Friday, November 9 - Thursday, November 15

All Preschool, Kindergarten and Combo 1 and 2 Classes

Saturday, November 17 - Sunday, November 18

All classes not listed in Watch Week #1

Watch Week #2 (Part 2)

Monday, November 26 - Thursday, November 29

All classes not listed in Watch Week #1