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## Dancewear Gallery offers a place to shop — and develop dance

BY Nadege Green



DANIEL BOCK / FREELANCE PHOTOGRAPHER

Dancers, from left, Ronderrick Mitchell, Ivonne Batanero, and Katie Wiegman, watch fellow cast members rehearse for their upcoming show, "Reaching the Surface," Thursday, May 13 in North Miami. Scheduled for June 4th and 5th at the Museum of Contemporary Art Plaza, poets, dancers and musicians will explore current and past views about HIV and AIDS.

Along North Miami's Northeast 125 Street arts district sits a dancewear shop and studio that has created a space for up-and-coming and established performing artists to create and explore movement.

And for dancers, experienced and novice, the studio offers a rotating roster of classes that include modern, ballet, flamenco and yogassage, a restorative yoga class that incorporates massage techniques.

At first glance, the Dancewear Gallery appears to be a dance supply shop filled with leotards, tutus, ballet slippers and other wares. But just beyond the store is a dance studio that houses the North Miami Arts Collective.

Marie Whitman, a native New Yorker who now calls Hollywood home, purchased the space in 2008.

More than just dance supplies, she sought to create an environment for performing artists to develop and showcase new works.

Last year, the studio launched a residency program that culminated with intimate showings of works in progress by local choreographers Rosie Herrera, Ana Bolt and Ana Miranda.

"We are giving artists a supportive space, but on the other hand we encourage artists to take responsibility for their work and to not only be of the mindset of a starving artist. We want to encourage them to realize that they have something of value to the community on a social level and emotional level."

Unlike many arts programs that rely on funding from grants, the partnership of her dancewear shop at 845 NE 125th St. helps to pay for the overhead costs of maintaining a dance studio.

Local artists also use the space for rehearsals.

Ronderrick Mitchell, an audition coach and dancer, was one of about a dozen dancers who rehearsed in Whitman's studio for a project about artists infected and affected by HIV/Aids.

Mitchell, a New World School of the Arts graduate, said affordable dance spaces are hard to come by in Miami.

“In a lot of local dance studios, it’s really difficult to get in for rehearsal space or it’s too expensive. It’s really sad, there aren’t more studios offering space for independent artists. More studios need to step up to the plate,” he said.

Located in a burgeoning visual arts district in North Miami, Whitman said her studio fills a void in the surrounding areas for creative performers.

Not limited to just dance, some evenings a patio space outside of the dance studio transforms into a spoken word poetry and music venue.

“We’re really trying to figure out how to give it a place in the community,” Whitman said. “We want it to be identified as a place in the North Miami community.”

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