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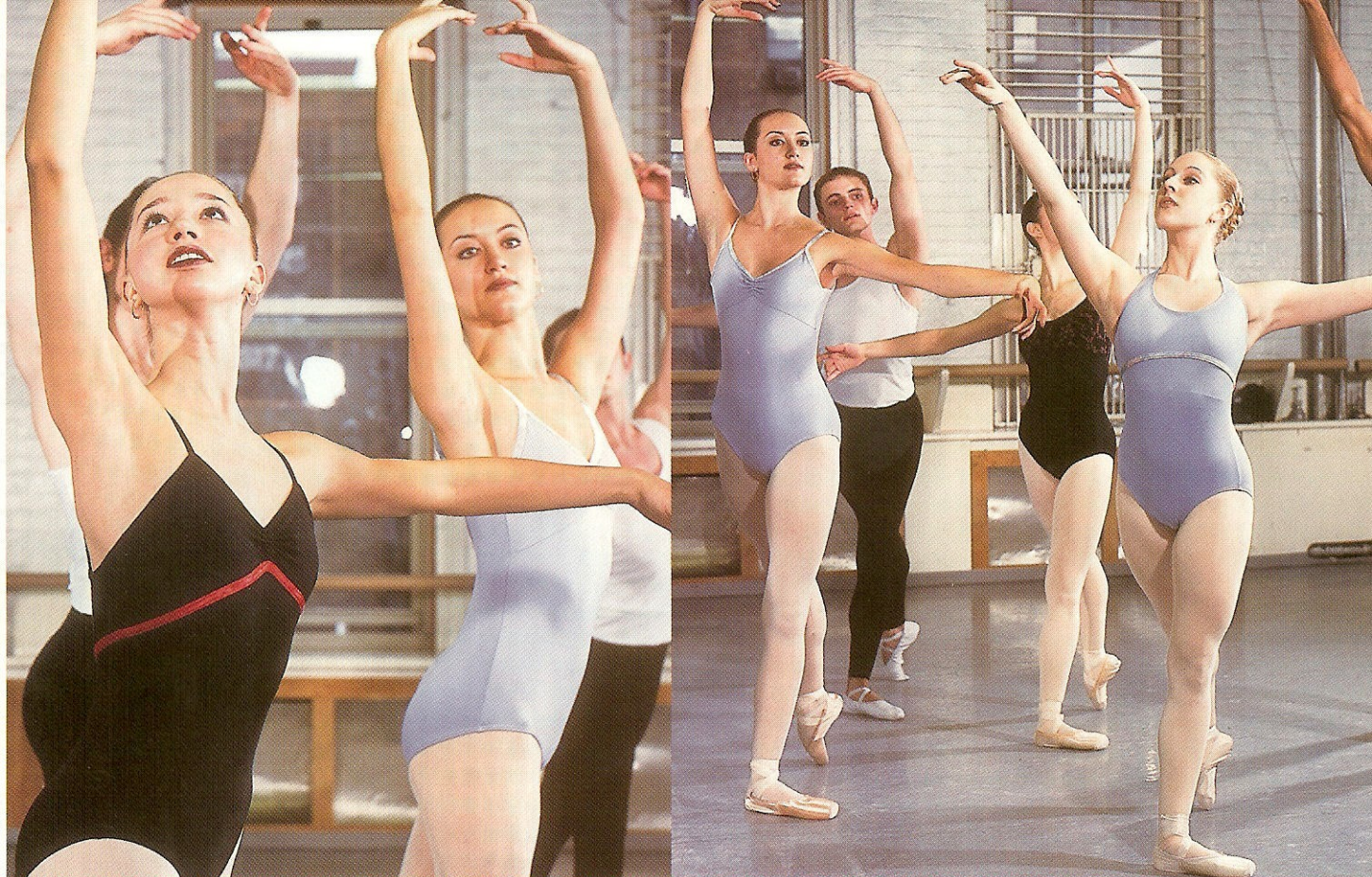
the talented

by Caitlin Sims



MR. HOWARD

Celebrity teacher David Howard shares his philosophy of teaching and learning.



HOWARD'S STUDENTS FROM THE JOFFREY/NEW SCHOOL UNIVERSITY BFA PROGRAM

"I've always liked to question things," says renowned ballet teacher and coach David Howard. His success in training dancers, from adult beginners to seasoned ballerinas, is proof that Howard is asking the right questions. Never one to rest on his laurels, the master educator is also a tireless student of dance pedagogy. His teaching philosophy focuses on a scientific approach to movement, incorporating anatomy and kinesiology as well as movement dynamics and musicality.

He doesn't hesitate to challenge the sanctity of the centuries-old traditions of ballet training: "I have to prove every day that I can do what I do, and then I have to reevaluate—is it working or isn't it? Do the students look better?"

In the five years since he has closed his school, the David Howard Dance Center, Howard has not skipped a beat. He has taught in England, Norway, Sweden, Denmark, Finland, Japan and Mexico, in addition to maintaining a busy teaching schedule in New York City at Broadway Dance Center, Steps on Broadway and at the Joffrey/New School University BFA program.

Born in London in 1937, Howard started his own dance training at age 10 at the Arts Educational School in England (whose alumni include Ben Stevenson, Lynn Semour and Julie Andrews) and continued at the Royal Academy of Dancing. He launched his professional career in his teens, singing at Radio Luxembourg three times a week and appearing in television shows and movies, including *Beau Brummell* with Elizabeth Taylor. From 1955 to 1957 he danced at the London

Palladium alongside variety show greats Debbie Reynolds, Liberace and Danny Kaye.

At 16, Howard had won a prestigious Adeline Genée medal at the Royal Academy of Dancing's annual competition. Four years later, remembering the talented student, Dame Ninette de Valois offered him a job with the Royal Ballet (then Sadler's Wells Ballet). Howard accepted the offer and stayed with the company for seven years. After a few years as a soloist with the National Ballet of Canada, he returned to England to work as a dancer with the Blue-Belle Girls and with Bob Fosse on *Little Me*. At 28, he retired from the stage. "I'd had it by then," he says. "My plan was to become a hairdresser, because I was having problems with my back. Then [dance patron] Rebekah Harkness called. She was starting a school and was looking for some apprentice teachers. I came over in 1966 and it changed my life. I did my teacher training program with Jo Anna Kneeland and Ruth Petrinovich and was at Harkness House for 11 years, until I started my own school in 1977."

Howard's school opened during the ballet boom of the '70s, the same year that *The Turning Point* was released, and his classes attracted the inner circle of ballet's luminaries. The film's star, Mikhail Baryshnikov, took classes at the Upper West Side studio, as did Rudolf Nureyev; American Ballet Theatre principals Natalia Makarova, Gelsey Kirkland, Patrick Bissell and Cynthia Harvey and actress and balletomane Mary Tyler Moore. Howard worked closely with Kirkland in retooling her technique and coaching her for performances. Her raves about his teaching in her 1986 autobiography, *Dancing on My Grave*, further cemented Howard's status as a celebrity teacher. The school was even profiled as a hub for dance "superstars" in *People* magazine in 1982.

The attention still surprises Howard. "I don't know how the celebrity happened," he says. "Madame Darvash once said 'You must have a press agent,' but I never did. I didn't realize the effects of working with people like Gelsey and Misha and Natasha." He remains close with all three and says that Baryshnikov