

Big Dreams for Young Ballerina

CONTINUED FROM FRONT

mas production of the Nutcracker. The performance will be at 5 p.m. on Friday, Dec. 20 at the Lincoln Performance Hall at Portland State University. The academy will have two other performances of the Nutcracker on Dec. 19 and 21, Rigles said, with different leading cast members for each performance, giving more kids the opportunity to share the spotlight.

But the spotlight is where Jones, a Russell Elementary fourth grader wants to be, she explained, as she moved lithe across the dance floor in the practice studio, preparing her moves. Eventually, she wants to open her own dance school and teach, she said.

Aanaiyah's grandmother, Bettye Jones, has been a mainstay in encouraging her granddaughter's passion for dance, which began the moment she crashed a ballet class that was underway at Peninsula Park when she was three.

"She saw a group of little

girls and she just went over a joined them," Bettye Jones said.

Ross said it's gratifying that a young dancer got her start through Portland Parks.

"She took dance instruction from teacher Sandy Shaner at Peninsula Park Community Center for two years starting at age three," Ross said. "Her skills and prowess led her to lessons at Portland's prestigious Classical Ballet Academy where her talent allowed her to skip ahead in their rigorous program and to begin advanced training year-round."

The young Jones said she picked the academy to advance her skills not just because of its dance curriculum, but also for its philosophy, in that it promotes "principles of fairness, equity, diversity and inclusion in relations to, and across, intersections of race, age, color, disability..." among other values she holds dear.

"I like what's being taught here, I like the teachers, the students, the parents and the whole program," she said.



PHOTO BY BEVERLY CORBELL/
THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

Aanaiyah Jones (center) is learning the skills necessary to become a professional ballerina thanks to the mentorship and instruction she receives from Sarah Rigles (left), director of the Classical Ballet, and the support and the encouragement of her grandmother, Bettye Jones.

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