

TRIBUTE TO PIERRE DULAINE

Transforming Young Lives
Through Dance

By Patrice Tanaka

Dancers understand the life-transforming nature of dance and many of us believe that if more people danced the world would be a more joyful place. Pierre Dulaine, four-time World Show Dance Champion (with his partner Yvonne Marceau), has actually made it his life's mission to transform the lives of young children one step at a time through Dancing Classrooms.

This wonderful non-profit, which inspired the award-winning documentary, "Mad Hot Ballroom," the film, "Take the Lead," starring Antonio Banderas, and, more recently, "Dancing in Jaffa," brings ballroom dance into public elementary schools.

"My childhood had a big impact on what I do now," said Pierre. "I was painfully shy as a child. When I came to England from the Middle East at age 13, I spoke with an accent. I had half a tooth and kids made fun of me so I didn't smile much. I only had a couple of friends and one of them suggested I take dance classes. I did and something stirred inside me. Suddenly, I was accepted through dance."

Dance totally changed Pierre's life and he vowed to make it his career. At 18, he took his Associate's Degree as a professional dancer. At 21, Pierre passed his three major exams in Ballroom, Latin and Old Tyme and became a full member of the Imperial Society of Teachers of Dance. He soon went on to twice win the "Duel of the Giants" at the Royal Albert Hall in London and captured the "All England Professional Latin American Championship." For the next few years, Pierre danced professionally in London, Paris, Nairobi (Kenya) and then signed on as cruise director of a ship traveling to the Caribbean. In 1972, he disembarked in New York City, planning to stay for two weeks and never left. Pierre got a job at an Arthur Murray Studio where he met Yvonne Marceau with

American Dancer Magazine has chosen Pierre Dulaine as a true legacy of dance, whose lifelong work -- "giving children the gift of dance" -- is among the dance world's most revered contributions. From shy Middle Eastern child to World Show Dance Champion and later to inspired teacher, Pierre Dulaine's journey has opened doors to hundreds of thousands of children and to an industry to follow in his footsteps.

whom he went on to win numerous awards and accolades, including the 1977, '78, '79 and '82 British Exhibition Championships.

In 1984, Pierre and Yvonne started the American Ballroom Theater Company to bring ballroom dance productions to theatrical settings and performed across the U.S., Europe and the Far East. In 1989, Pierre and Yvonne joined Tommy Tune's Broadway show "Grand Hotel" for 2 ½ years.

In 1994, Pierre, who never forgot the life-transforming experience of ballroom dance as a painfully shy 13-year old, began teaching it on a volunteer basis at a New York City elementary school. He wanted to use ballroom dancing as a "tool" to teach children critical life skills such as confidence, respect and teamwork. "At Dancing Classrooms, we refer to children as 'young ladies and gentlemen' and very shortly they begin to respond in that fashion," Pierre said.

According to Executive Director John Schultz, Dancing Classrooms is a Social and Emotional Learning program that has shown to enhance self-esteem, confidence and cooperation among children.

The program that Pierre Dulaine started in one public elementary school on the West Side of Manhattan in 1994 has since helped to transform the lives of more than 400,000 children in 31 cities and five countries. These children are the true "legacy" of ballroom champion and Dancing Classrooms founder Pierre Dulaine. ♪



Patrice Tanaka is an amateur ballroom dancer and author of "Becoming Ginger Rogers...How Ballroom Dancing Made Me a Happier Woman, Better Partner and Smarter CEO." She's also a trustee of Dancing Classrooms.