

"Dance Fever" 2003 By LAURA BLEIBERG THE ORANGE COUNTY REGISTER

Dance classes are booming in O.C. It's not all just about soccer anymore. Just when it looked like soccer had managed a shutout of all other extracurricular activities, a surprising trend comes along. What kids really want, what they – or their parents – are really clamoring for, is (drum roll) dance lessons.

Consider the evidence: Pacific Coast Academy of Dance in San Clemente started offering ballet, hip-hop, jazz, lyrical and Pilates in May 2002. Its enrollment has ballooned to 400.

There is a slew of cultural forces at work to encourage and interest new students. For the kindergarten set, television shows and toy marketing have had a great influence, and imagery of ballet and ballerinas is exceedingly popular right now. The recent Barbie "Swan Lake" animated video and the popular PBS-TV series "Angelina Ballerina" have the littlest girls asking for tutus. Parents and teachers also said the value of dance in promoting physical fitness and discipline has encouraged older students.

Owners of more than a dozen dance studios throughout the county reported seeing an upswing in the number of young people eager to set their bodies in motion. Not everyone is experiencing increased enrollment. But even those owners who have seen studios spring up around them said they are not losing students.

This seems to be a national trend and not merely a factor of local growth. There are, however, no reliable statistics to substantiate it. John Munger, director of research and information for the service organization Dance/USA, said that for the past year, he has gotten more requests for the number of dance students nationally than for any other statistic.

Local studio owners whose net enrollment has remained steady said many of their students are taking more classes a week than previously, indicating an increasing interest in serious study. A few other trends were noteworthy: More adults are enrolling, hip-hop dance is extremely popular, and some students are drawn to studios that participate in dance competitions – although others purposely avoid those studios.

And what about the effect of soccer? With all those future Mia Hamms out there kicking the ball around, who is left for ballet? It turns out that girls are doing both.

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FAMILY: Celeste Prolo spends a moment with daughter Marisa before class at Pacific Coast Academy. Adults are not only the chauffeurs in the dance boom – many are also participants, studios say.



PHOTOS: CINDY YAMANAKA, THE REGISTER

ON THE MOVE: Like more and more youngsters flocking to studios, students work on steps at Pacific Coast Academy of Dance in San Clemente. **CLASSICS:** Toe shoes are de rigueur for many students of ballet, a form coming to kids' attention through means such as a Barbie "Swan Lake" animated video and the PBS television series "Angelina Ballerina."