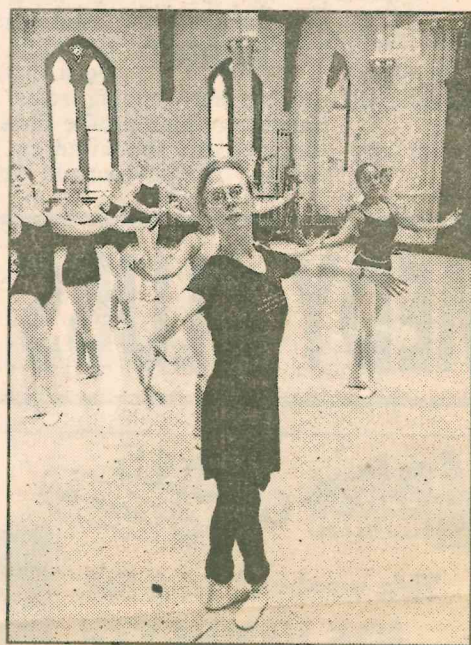




Legendary dancer Allegra Kent teaches in Cambridge



STAFF PHOTO BY PATRICK WHITTEMORE

MASTER AT WORK: Ballerina Allegra Kent lines up students for exercises at Jose Mateo's Sanctuary Theatre. She is a guest faculty member this week at Mateo's annual Summer Program.

An honored guest

It's only 11 a.m., but the staggering July heat and humidity are in full force in the spacious main studio of Jose Mateo's Ballet Theatre in Harvard Square. Allegra Kent is leading 30 or so students in a series of traveling phrases, though she doesn't seem perturbed by the temperature. Neither do the dancers, who remain focused on the task.

One wonders if these young students have even an inkling of Kent's grand history. In a black leotard and simple skirt, the legendary ballerina gives the appearance of being in her 40s. In fact, she'll celebrate her 64th birthday next month.

Dance

THEODORE BALE

Born in California, Kent studied ballet with Bronislava Nijinska (sister of the great *danseur* Nijinsky), then joined the New York City Ballet in 1952, when she was just 15. She became a principal dancer at City Ballet in 1957, and premiered some of George Balanchine's greatest works there, including "Ivesiana," "Agon" and "Bugaku."

Kent is a guest faculty member this week at Mateo's annual Summer Program, though it's not her first teaching stint with the company. Sipping iced tea after class in the air-conditioned splendor of a nearby cafe, she said she couldn't remember exactly when she met Mateo. She did recall, though, that it was in a swimming pool somewhere in Manhattan.

"We swam at the same pool in New York City decades ago," said Kent. "There was no one in the swimming pools in New York then, they were empty. I was doing these unusual exercises. I put water wings on my ankles and did splits. I invented

Turn to Page S11

Kent raises barre for dancers

From Page S5

these exercises particularly for ballet dancers."

What started as a casual friendship blossomed into an important professional association for both Mateo and Kent.

"He heard I was coming up here to teach a master class at Harvard, years ago, and he asked me to teach for him, so I did. I usually come up for a week or less," Kent said.

"It's an open program here, so there's a vast (range) of experience," she explained. "I try to look at the students at whatever level they are, and give them something."

What about Mateo's ever-growing repertory of original ballets?

"He's superb, he has just a great gift, so that's always thrilling. And it's unusual, because today we have so many terrific dancers but so few good choreographers," she said.

Kent also loves Mateo's rehearsal and performance space, The Sanctuary Theatre, at Old Cambridge Baptist Church.

"It's a great pleasure for me to be up here. This church, this space, it's incredible," she said. "Depending on the stained glass, (during class)

someone's elbow might be red, someone's ear might be green and someone's fingertip might be blue, and then someone's shoulder might be yellow. I was thinking today, I should do little bounces, so (the dancers) will bounce in and out of these lights ... Try to capture a red toe! Jose really has a grand space."

Kent said ballet training has "more finesse" than it did when she was a teenager. "The lines of ballet have extended. They didn't use the kind of high legs that are used today," she said. "Now, everything is higher, larger."

Kent described her experiences with Nijinska and Balanchine as "extraordinary," however.

"Once Nijinska took my hand in class, and nodded to the pianist, and her hand had an electrical charge to it," said Kent. "It communicated success before we had even started (dancing). That was a feeling I had hoped I would get from ballet, that exuberance, and the combination of muscle strength with desire. She was like an Olympic coach. She could detect things not only in your body,

but in your psyche as well. Before you started, she could see if you were defeated.

"All great ballet teachers have generosity, and a great eye. It's sort of like all great athletes. Ted Williams had extraordinary eyesight, that's what they all said about him," said Kent.

Was learning Balanchine's intricate choreography a laborious process? Kent said no.

"It was never an arduous process for Balanchine to choreograph. He always came in prepared. Balanchine never pondered. It was there, and everything flowed out of him, like a river ... the Mississippi, the Amazon, the blue Nile. It just flowed."

She described Balanchine's notorious classes as "meticulous and excruciating."

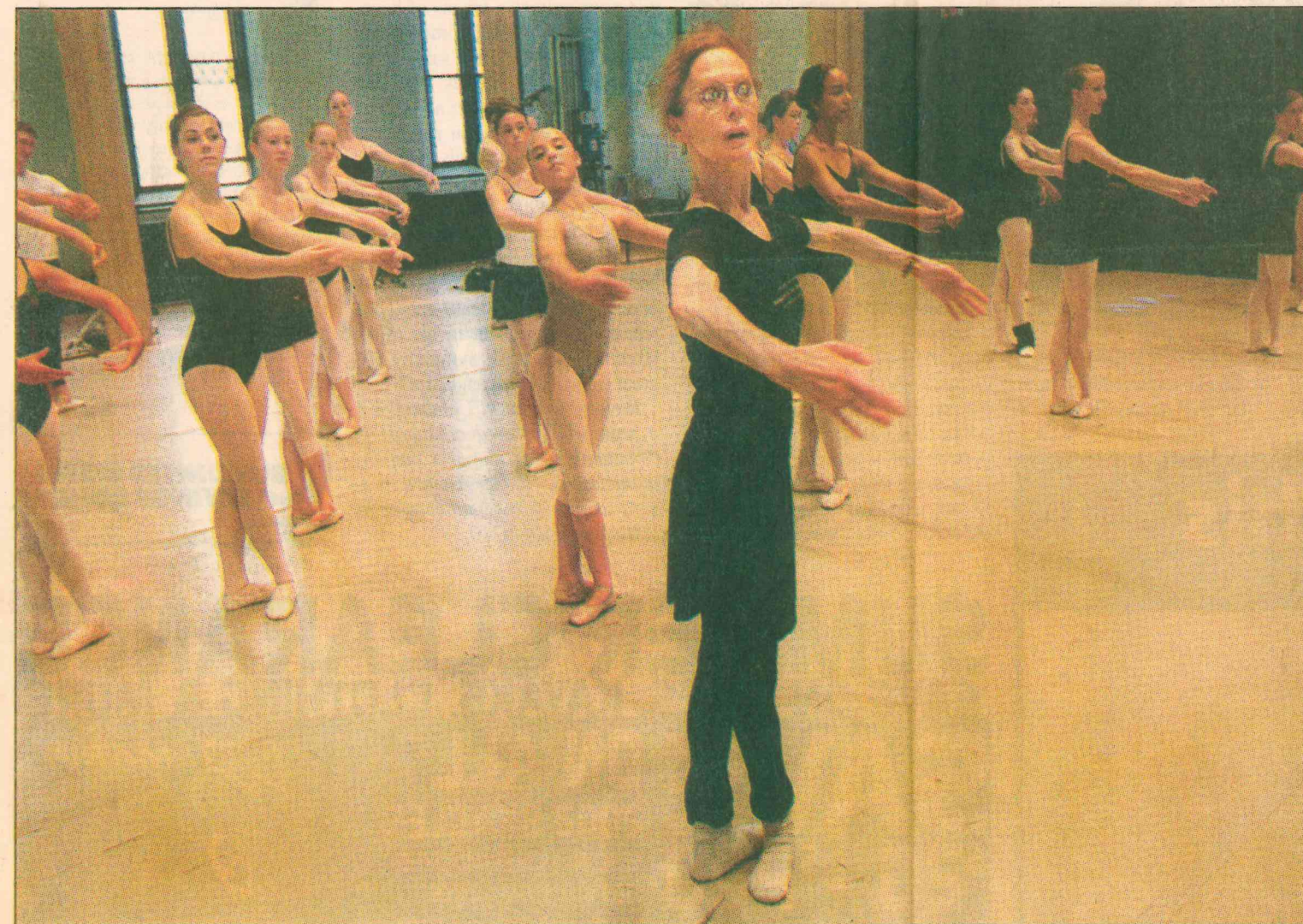
"He didn't really warm you up, actually. That's why I invented those water exercises, so I could do those first, and stretch and get in touch with my body. Balanchine wanted to see the results right away. He believed in quantity, not choreography, at the barre," said Kent.

CAMBRIDGE TAB

Community Newspaper Company ■ www.townonline.com/cambridge

FRIDAY, JULY 19, 2002

Vol. 20, No. 48 ■ 44 Pages ■ 3 Sections



Allegra Kent leads students at Jose Matteo's Sanctuary Theatre.

Dance history in their midst

Famed dancer Allegra Kent teaches in Harvard Square

By Theodore Bale
BOSTON HERALD

It's only 11 a.m., but the staggering July heat and humidity are in full force in the spacious main studio of Jose Mateo's Ballet Theatre in Harvard Square. Allegra Kent is leading 30 or so students in a series of traveling phrases, though she doesn't seem perturbed by the temperature. Neither do the dancers, who remain focused on the task.

One wonders if these young students have even an inkling of Kent's grand history. In a black leotard and simple skirt, the legendary ballerina gives the appearance of being in her 40s. In fact, she'll celebrate her 64th birthday next month.

Born in California, Kent studied ballet with Bronislava Nijinska (sister of the great danseur Nijinsky), then joined the New York City Ballet

in 1952, when she was just 15. She became a principal dancer at City Ballet in 1957, and premiered some of George Balanchine's greatest works there, including "Ivesiana," "Agon" and "Bugaku."

Kent is a guest faculty member this week at Mateo's annual Summer Program, though it's not her first teaching stint with the company. Sipping iced tea after class in the air-conditioned splendor of a nearby cafe, she says she couldn't remember exactly when she met Mateo. She did recall, though, that it was in a swimming pool somewhere in Manhattan.

"We swam at the same pool in New York City decades ago," says Kent. "There was no one in the swimming pools in New York then, they were empty. I was doing these unusu-

KENT, page 4

Local teacher brings dance history

KENT, from page 1

al exercises. I put water wings on my ankles and did splits. I invented these exercises particularly for ballet dancers."

What started as a casual friendship blossomed into an important professional association for both Mateo and Kent.

"He heard I was coming up here to teach a master class at Harvard, years ago, and he asked me to teach for him, so I did. I usually come up for a week or less," Kent says.

"It's an open program here, so there's a vast (range) of experience," she explains. "I try to look at the students at whatever level they are, and give them something."

What about Mateo's ever-growing repertory of original ballets?

"He's superb, he has just a great gift, so that's always thrilling. And it's unusual, because today we have so many terrific dancers but so few good choreographers," she says.

Kent also loves Mateo's rehearsal and performance space, The Sanctuary Theatre, at Old Cambridge Baptist Church.

"It's a great pleasure for me to be up here. This church, this space, it's incredible," she says. "Depending on the stained glass, [during class] someone's elbow might be red, someone's ear might be green and someone's fingertip might be blue, and then someone's shoulder might be yellow. I was thinking today, I should do little bounces, so [the dancers] will bounce in and out of these lights... Try to capture a red toe! Jose really has a grand space."

Kent says ballet training has "more finesse" than it did when she was a teenager. "The lines of ballet have extended. They didn't use the kind of high legs that are used today," she says. "Now, everything is higher, larger."

Kent described her experiences with Nijinska and Balanchine as "extraordinary," however.

"Once Nijinska took my hand in class, and nodded to the pianist, and her hand had an electrical charge to it," says Kent. "It communicated success before we had even started (dancing). That was a feeling I had hoped I would get from ballet, that exuberance, and the combination of muscle strength with desire. She was like

an Olympic coach. She could detect things not only in your body, but in your psyche as well. Before you started, she could see if you were defeated.

"All great ballet teachers have generosity, and a great eye. It's sort of like all great athletes. Ted Williams had extraordinary eyesight, that's what they all said about him," says Kent.

Was learning Balanchine's intricate choreography a laborious process? Kent says no.

"It was never an arduous process for Balanchine to choreograph. He always came in prepared. Balanchine never pondered. It was there, and everything flowed out of him, like a river... the Mississippi, the Amazon, the blue Nile. It just flowed."

She describes Balanchine's notorious classes as "meticulous and excruciating."

"He didn't really warm you up, actually," she says. "That's why I invented those water exercises, so I could do those first, and stretch and get in touch with my body. Balanchine wanted to see the results right away. He believed in quantity, not choreography, at the barre."