Arts & culture

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NEW YORK CITY BALLET

DANCE WITH THE DANCERS

Legendary dancer Allegra Kent teaches in Cambridge

STAFF PHOTO BY 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.

t's only ll 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 ballering gives the appearance of heing in her 40s

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 stim with the company. Sipping iced tea after class in the air-conditioned splendor of a pearby cafe she said she couldn't re-

ditioned splendor of a nearby cafe, she said she couldn't re-

member 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 da

From Page S5

to teach a master class at Harvard, years ago, and he asked me to teach

Kent said ballet training has "more was learning Balanchine's intrifinesse" than it did when she was a cate choreography a laborious profor a week or less," Kent said.

she explained. "I try to look at the larger." students at whatever level they are, Kent described her experiences everything flowed out of him, like a and give them something."

What about Mateo's ever-growing traordinary," however. 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 it," said Kent. "It communicated sucunusual, because today we have so it," said Kent. "It communicated suc-many terrific dancers but so few cess before we had even started actually. That's why I invented those

"It's a great pleasure for me to be detect things not only in your body, at the barre," said Kent. up here. This church, this space, it's incredible," she said. "Depending on the stained glass, (during class)

these exercises particularly for ballet someone's fingertip might be blue, were defeated. and then someone's shoulder might "All great ballet teachers have gen-What started as a casual friendship be yellow. I was thinking today, I erosity, and a great eye. It's sort of blossomed into an important profes- should do little bounces, so (the like all great athletes. Ted Williams sional association for both Mateo dancers) will bounce in and out of had extraordinary eyesight, that's these lights ... Try to capture a red what they all said about him," said "He heard I was coming up here toe! Jose really has a grand space." Kent.

for him, so I did. I usually come up teenager. "The lines of ballet have cess? Kent said no. extended. They didn't use the kind of "It was never an arduous process "It's an open program here, so high legs that are used today," she there's a vast (range) of experience," said. "Now, everything is higher, always came in prepared. Balanchine

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good choreographers," she said. (dancing). That was a feeling I had water exercises, so I could do those kent also loves Mateo's rehearsal hoped I would get from ballet, that first, and stretch and get in touch and performance space, The Sanc- exuberance, and the combination of with my body. Balanchine wanted to tuary Theatre, at Old Cambridge muscle strength with desire. She was see the results right away. He belike an Olympic coach. She could lieved in quantity, not choreography,

someone's elbow might be red, but in your psyche as well. Before someone's ear might be green and you started, she could see if you

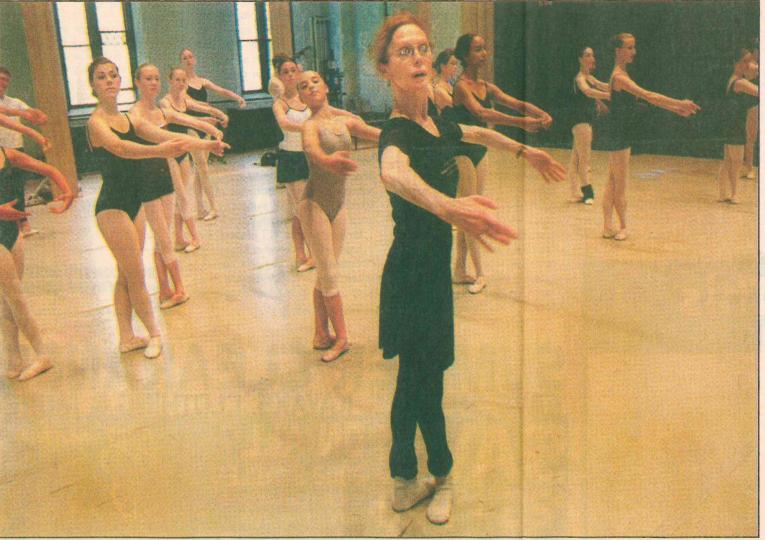
never pondered. It was there, and with Nijinska and Balanchine as "ex-traordinary," however. river . . . the Mississippi, the Amazon, the blue Nile. It just flowed."

Seniors PAGE 2

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FRIDAY, JULY 19, 2002

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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

I full force in the spacious main studio of Jose Mateo's Ballet Theatre "Agon" and "Bugaku." 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. teaching stint with the company. Sip-Neither do the dancers, who remain focused on the task.

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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

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

pending 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... ly has a grand space."

Kent says ballet training has she was a teenager. "The lines of ballet have extended. They didn't everything is higher, larger."

Kent described her experiences flowed." 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 quantity, not choreography, at the strength with desire. She was like barre."

"It's a great pleasure for me to an Olympic coach. She could debe up here. This church, this space, tect things not only in your body, it's incredible," she says. "De- 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 intri-Try to capture a red toe! Jose real- cate choreography a laborious process? Kent says no.

"It was never an arduous process "more finesse" than it did when for Balanchine to choreograph. He always came in prepared. Balanchine never pondered. It was there, use the kind of high legs that are and everything flowed out of him, used today," she says. "Now, like a river . . . the Mississippi, the Amazon, the blue Nile. It just

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