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At Oceanside Dance

Academy,

it's more than just dance:

It's a lifestyle.



Anjelica Wilson, owner of the Oceanside Dance Academy in Oceanside, California, explains why **“... it’s so much more than dance: It’s a lifestyle.”**

Ms Wilson has a good reason to call the business a lifestyle: It’s been a part of her life from the beginning. Her mother, a Polynesian dancer with a Master’s Degree in dance from UCI in Irvine, California, started the Oceanside Dance Academy, or ODA, in 1990. Ms Wilson’s father, a United States Marine stationed in Oceanside, built the studio as well as the other studios the family opened after 2010. While in her early 20’s Ms Wilson switched her energy from the performing side of dance to the creative side as a choreographer. She also took over the studio when her mother, the talented Polynesian dancer, passed away. Ms Wilson incorporated the business and began the process of expanding it beyond the original building in Oceanside. Despite the growth from a single location to multiple academies, the focus remained on specific core elements.

ODA and its affiliates adhere to a multifaceted curriculum with a strong foundation that teaches life skills as much as it teaches dance. Students begin at the tender age of two and a half with a ‘Mommy and Me’ class. In this class, students and their parent or guardian stand, clap, and play in time to songs. Staff members use a variety of props to keep students engaged as they learn to move to music and to develop flexibility. When students are potty trained and able to participate in a class without the presence of a parent, they progress into an hour long class divided into two sessions. Ballet and tap classes comprise the core curriculum for younger students until they reach the age of seven years. At that time they have multiple options, many of which require a minimum of two hours of ballet in addition to the discipline they choose.

“Ballet is the foundation of all dances.”¹

After ballet, students have options such as hip hop, tumbling, jazz, contemporary/lyrical, and ‘tazz,’ a combination of tap and jazz. Many classes combine elements of multiple dances, allowing instructors to provide a more versatile foundation based on the capabilities of students at various age levels.

¹ <http://oceansidedance.com/our-classes/new-classes/>



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- ✧ Ballet and jazz classes contain more structure and are the basis for the full curriculum.
- ✧ Tap creates music through the feet.
- ✧ Hip hop is a looser, fast paced class that introduces the use of popular movements to accompany newer, popular songs.
- ✧ Contemporary focuses less on technique: It is more style and performance based. Students are not introduced to this style until they are eleven or twelve years old.

Ms Wilson states that “[Students] ... need the technical foundation and must understand discipline before moving to free style.”

The curriculum prepares students for more than an annual recital or a series of competitions: It prepares students for college, careers, and life.

Students as young as 12 or 13 years of age learn how to teach through a mentorship program. Ms Wilson’s focus is to be a leader, to focus on abundance and what brings joy to the studio. There is a ‘need’ to respect the differences in other people. The philosophy works: Graduates of ODA often go into collegiate programs. From there they become professional dancers or dance teachers and often progress into other professional positions. In a single year, seven out of eight graduates from ODA continued their dance in a collegiate program. Some of those graduates may find themselves drawn back to the familial environment of ODA.

The staff in October of 2017 consisted of 28 people, 23 of whom grew up as dancers in the academy. Eight of the instructors have been with the establishment from the beginning. All of the graduating dancers know they will have a place to teach later, and some come back to take dance classes even if they have jobs elsewhere. Families of students are a part of the extended dance family as well.

With a competition season beginning in February and ending in July each year, dancers and their families often find themselves traveling together almost every weekend. Parents and instructors share the growing pains of students who grow up and leave the ‘nest.’ In some instances, the business has an opportunity to step in and assist a parent with that empty feeling. In at least one case, a parent was hired as a member of the front-end staff for ODA after her child graduated from both high school and the academy and subsequently left the nest.



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It is a true family environment. The academy has grown with the addition of other facilities, but has never seen the split of instructors leaving to start their own dance studio. Students have not left in the 'mass exodus' often seen in the dance industry when changes occur in staffing or in curriculum. This dedication to the family atmosphere and a safe learning environment continues to pay off in multiple ways.

Ms Wilson stated that ODA competition teams often win awards in Southern California and Las Vegas competitions. In addition, the academy has won the titles of 'Most Professional Dance Studio' through the Oceanside Award Program and the City of Oceanside as well as the 'Best Dance Instructors' award in an online voting poll from the "Best of Awards" in the *San Diego Magazine*. Glossing over the details of the awards, Ms Wilson added that their curriculum is not awards based. Students advance by learning the techniques, discipline, and respect for the art and their dance family, but they do not earn 'achievement' trophies at yearly recitals. However, students who have remained in the program for five years receive recognition at a recital.

Longevity and diversity may be the keys to the success of ODA. By offering a variety of dance styles with a focus on long-term progress, the academy fulfills its promise to be more than a competition-based studio.

"As a leader I try to focus on the abundance that we have in this world," Ms Wilson stated. "It's focusing on the joy of the children and the joy of the curriculum."

With the abundance of children, styles, and studios, Ms Wilson feels that

"There's a place for everyone. Everyone can dance."

Content created from an interview with Oceanside Dance Academy owner Anjelica Wilson on 3 October 2017 and material on the ODA website as of 19 October, 2017. All material used with permission of Ms Wilson.

For more information please visit the Oceanside Dance Academy website at:
<http://oceansidedance.com/>

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