

## NEW SCHOOL FOR BALLET

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Kirkland Dances to Her Own Music  
The Wall Street Journal  
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By ERICA ORDEN

In her tenure as one of classical ballet's biggest stars, Gelsey Kirkland was known for her superior artistry, as well as for a career derailed by the demons of drug abuse and eating disorders—issues she has attributed in part to the demands of her dance training. Now the 57-year-old New Yorker is thrusting herself into the business of training future generations with a new school she is opening in TriBeCa.

On Monday, Ms. Kirkland and her husband, choreographer Michael Chernov, will open the Gelsey Kirkland Academy of Classical Ballet, a pre-professional dance school designed to compete with intensive courses like the School of American Ballet and the American Ballet Theatre's Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis School, which feed students into top companies.

"Every great institution needs its challengers," said Jacques d'Amboise, founder of the National Dance Institute and a former principal dancer with the New York City Ballet. "She was right there among the best dancers that America ever had, so any student that can have her as a model?" He expressed his enthusiasm by referring to a leaping ballet step: "We should clap and cabriole with delight."

In the past, most notably in her autobiography, "Dancing on My Grave," Ms. Kirkland has described harrowing experiences with the competitive nature of classical ballet training, saying that its "'concentration camp' aesthetic" contributed to her eventual addiction to cocaine, as well as battles with anorexia and bulimia. So spearheading her own rigorous program—full-time students will complete 36 hours of classes per week, at a cost of \$11,000 per year—comes with some baggage.

But Ms. Kirkland has long-since defeated those problems, and besides, she is not new to teaching. Since the conclusion of her career as a dancer, which began as a protégée of George Balanchine at New York City Ballet and went on to include many years with ABT and London's Royal Ballet, she has taught around the world, including at the Royal Ballet School and the Australian Ballet.

But until now she has not enjoyed her own forum for training dancers through the extended course of their development, nor for dispersing her distinct ideology—which values acting and character development as much as technical skill—in a systematic way. The school's syllabus, for example, will include courses in mime, stage combat, period movement and critical analysis, plus ballet classes in French and Danish styles, as well as the Russian method known as Vaganova, which is used by few pre-professional programs in New York.

"I think this is a really difficult undertaking," said Diane Grumet, managing director and co-artistic director of Steps on Broadway, an Upper West Side dance studio where Ms. Kirkland taught until June. "But I think what she has to offer in working with the Vaganova method—I think there is a niche for this in New York City."

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