
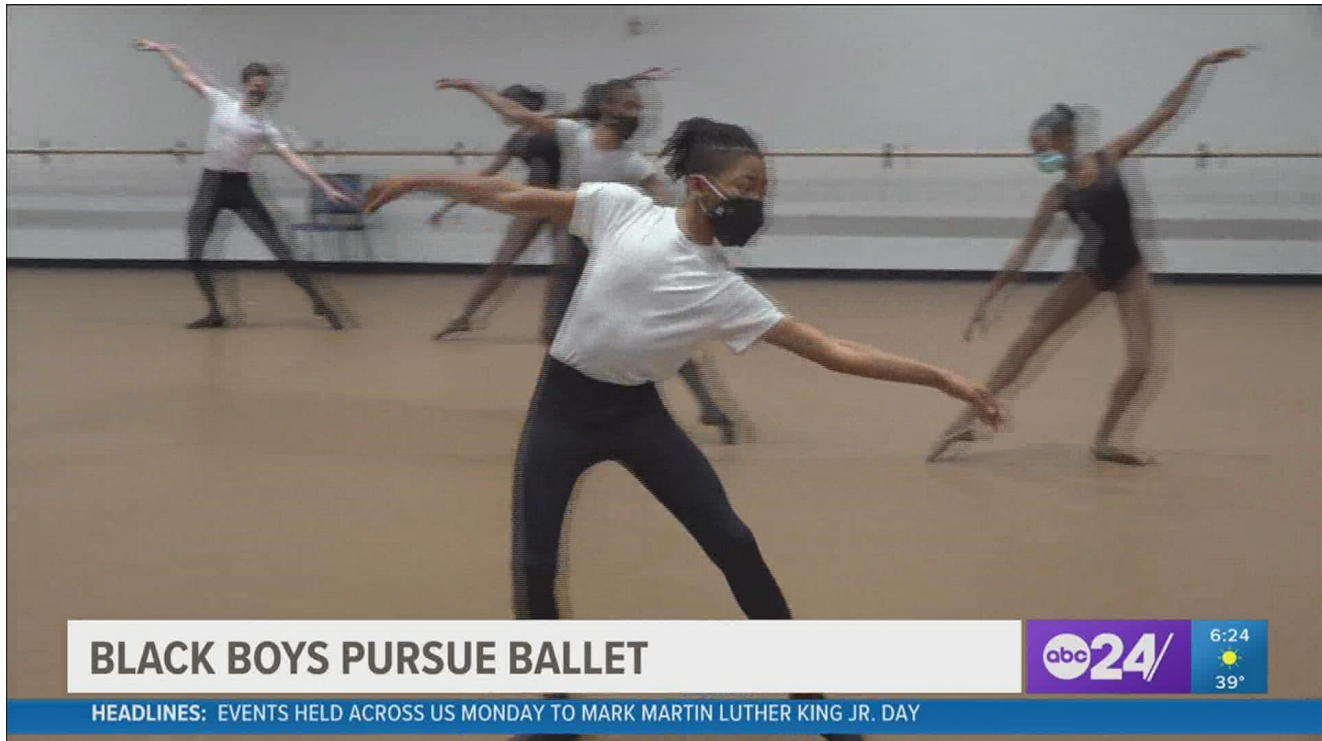


Collage Dance Collective helps black boys pursue dance

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Collage Dance Collective helps black boys pursue ballet

The studio aims to create diversity in dance.



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MEMPHIS, Tenn. — Memphis may be known for its Jookin dance form but one dance company, the Collage Dance Collective, is proving ballet can be a part of the city's identity too. They work to improve diversity in dance, especially black boys.

Caleb Thompson is one such black young man. He has been dancing ballet the last 3 years, but like many boys his age, his first thought was that it wasn't for him.

"I was one of those people that thought, 'ew ballet's for girls. That's not something a boy should be doing,'" Thompson said.

He initially started ballet to further his love of acting in musicals and he feared he may be the only boy in his class.

"To my surprise, I wasn't. The first time I did ballet, there were three boys. It was me and two other boys and I was like really surprised," Thompson said. "There were a lot more black, white boys doing ballet than I would ever think to be."

Thompson dances at the Collage Dance Collective in Binghamton. Started by two black men, Marcellus Harper and Kevin Thomas.

"From my own experience as a young dancer of color, I grew up in Montreal and there was no representation at all," Thomas said.

Collage works to change that representation. The dance studio began in 2008 with just one student. Now there are over 450. At the conservatory, they have about 25 boys, and in the Community Engagement Program called 'Turning Point' they have 49 boys who take dance.

For black boys, ballet challenges stereotypes.

"There's so much stigma in society about what we can and can't do, what we're supposed to be doing. Our youths, we need as many opportunities as possible. We don't need limits, we need opportunities," said Thompson.

While the dances may look beautiful, Thomas said the dance form is as demanding as any sport.

"I've taught football players and basketball players. They come and take ballet because they know it makes their legs, their balance and their coordination better," Thomas said.

Instructors like Thomas and peers dancing beside Thompson have helped the young actor put his best foot forward.

"They're so talented and so strong and it really inspired me to keep going with this," Thomas said.

Collage Dance Collective is preparing for their next big performance on Feb 19-20 for Black History Month that will be in the Cannon Performing Arts Center.



Watch Video At: https://youtu.be/7Er-_NkJ5c