

Ventura

Friday, April 22, 2011

■ **Artistic Touch**
Happiness pervades the artwork of Steve Stein. "I don't paint anything that is sad," he said. 48

Do the 'peacock walk'

■ Ventura Ballet promotes 'Jungle Book,' captivates

By Anne Kallas
Special to The Star

Dressed as a peacock, Malindi Walker gracefully waved her arms up and down like a bird, kicked her pointed toes behind her, and 30 children gathered at Barnes & Noble in Ventura followed suit.

Rilyan Howard, 4, of Ventura was entranced as Walker and four other young women

from the Ventura County Ballet Company demonstrated some simple dance steps during the story-time event Wednesday at the bookstore. The company was promoting its production "The Jungle Book," scheduled for May 21 and 22 at the Oxnard Performing Arts Center.

On Wednesday, ballet company Executive Director Kathleen Noblin read excerpts from Rudyard Kipling's "The Jungle Book" as part of National Turn off the TV Week, which the company celebrated with two events.

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ABOVE RIGHT: Kathleen Noblin, executive director of the Ventura County Ballet Company, reads "The Jungle Book."

RIGHT: Children watch and try to emulate the peacock walk, as performed by Walker.



PHOTOS BY BONNIE QUINN/SPECIAL TO THE STAR

Malindi Walker rises above the bookshelves as she warms up in her pointe shoes Wednesday at Barnes & Noble in Ventura. Walker portrays Princess Peacock in the Ventura County Ballet Company's production "The Jungle Book." Walker and other dancers were promoting the show at the bookstore.

BOOK from 1B

"We want to personally introduce the children to ballet while introducing them to 'The Jungle Book,' an original ballet, and are hoping they will come to see it," Noblin said, adding that the ballet company encourages children to "turn off the television and do other things with their lives."

In addition to the story time, the ballet company hosted a Jungle Book Garden Tea at Wedgewood Banquet Center in Ventura.

Lori Swanson, a board member of the ballet company, said organizers are very excited about the production, which is based on the classic Kipling tales

of the feral child Mowgli, who is raised by wolves in the jungle.

"This ballet is more outside the classical box. It's really fun. The music is lively and the dancing is lively. There are all different kinds of animals. I really think this will appeal to the boys as well as the girls," Swanson said.

Walker dazzled the children in her costume, made with real peacock feathers embossed with sequins, as she went en pointe to demonstrate the peacock walk, complete with bobbing neck and hands flapping behind her back.

"I like to work with kids. The best part is watching their reactions, how they look up to you and want to be like you," she said.

She plays one of four

peacocks who will be using large peacock fans as part of their dance.

"This ballet is not so much classical. It has a more modern feel. That's not to say there's not some pointe work," she said.

Sarah Otterstrom of Ventura brought her sons Jonas Rutherford, 4, and Elliot Rutherford, 2, and daughter Leona Rutherford, 9 months, to the Barnes & Noble event because both boys are taking ballet lessons.

"I feel ballet gives them the confidence to go on stage, follow directions with their bodies, and listen to music and rhythm," Otterstrom said as her boys followed the program, entranced.

After Noblin finished reading the story, show-

ing the children pictures of some of the principal characters in the upcoming ballet, Julia Palacia, community relations manager for Barnes & Noble, led the children in a variety of activities, including making "jungle jewelry" with beads and pipe cleaners.

"The Jungle Book" is directed by Rodney Gustafson, who choreographed the ballet with Gary McKenzie.

"The Jungle Book" will be presented at 7 p.m. May 21 and 2 p.m. May 22 at the Oxnard Performing Arts Center, 800 Hobson Way, Oxnard. Tickets are \$10 to \$25. For tickets, call the box office at 486-2424 or the company office at 648-2080 or go online to <http://www.oxnardpacc.com> or <http://www.venturacountyballet.com>.