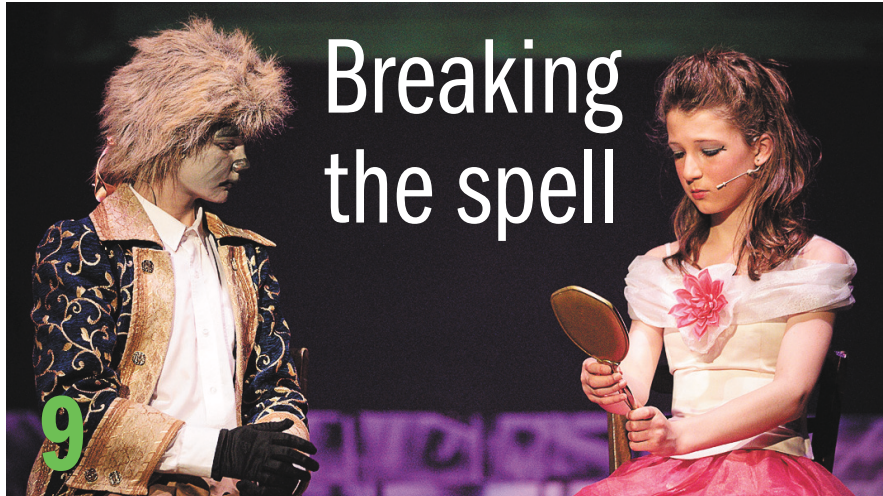


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Putting it out there

THE TRIBUNE

YOUR WINDOW TO THE COMMUNITY
WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 9, 2011

A pair for life of dance

Two Palmerston North dance students have been accepted into the New Zealand School of Dance in Wellington. They talk to **Judith Lacy**.

Shai Waitford

Shai Waitford's rise to professional dance training has been meteoric.

Even a mishap during training a month before did not stop him successfully auditioning for the New Zealand School of Dance contemporary major.

He whacked his left ankle on a bar in his garage while working on his audition piece.

Shai says dancing found him – more than he found dancing – after he said yes to people who gave him opportunities.

In year 11 he was asked to be part of a cheerleading squad at Freyberg High School. At first he said “no way”, but he ended up having a go and enjoyed the flips and throwing people. He was spotted by school dance teacher Caroline Rhodes and encouraged to take up dance.

It is just over a year ago he had his first formal lessons outside school.

At times it's been “pretty crazy” and he felt out of his league doing ballet with 10-year-old girls who are “smoking me”.

But Shai has kept at it and saw the potential he had.

Since he was a child he has enjoyed physical training.

“I like the feeling of just moving.”

The 19-year-old has spent the year training for the School of Dance, combined with a part-time job in menswear retail.

Before the injury, his regime was 6 to 8 hours training, five days a week, doing ballet, contemporary, hip hop, capoeira, rap dancing, tricking and martial arts.

Shai got as far as the interviews at last year's School of Dance auditions but he and the panel both agreed he should wait a year.

He learns ballet from Michelle Robinson, contemporary from Marika McConachy and hip hop from Sio Vaelua.



They're in: Palmerston North dancers Ashley Hodges, left, and Shai Waitford have been accepted to the New Zealand School of Dance in Wellington.

Photo: ROBERT KITCHIN

Ashley Hodges

Dance starts with D and so do the discipline, determination and the drive required to succeed as a dancer.

For Ashley Hodges that includes a dance class on her 18th birthday and a *Tribune* interview.

Ashley is in her final year at Horowhenua College in Levin and four days a week travels to Palmerston North for lessons with Michelle Robinson.

She auditioned to major in classical dance, but the School of Dance panel selected her for contemporary.

After classes and a solo, shortlisted applicants were interviewed.

Born and raised in Levin, Ashley has been dancing since she was four.

Three years ago she started travelling to Palmerston North for lessons as she was the only senior student at her dance school in Levin. She learns ballet and jazz from Robinson and, on the days she does not travel, works at the Levin Cosmopolitan Club.

Her goal is to be a professional dancer – she does not know what else to do.

“Without dancing I would be stuck.”

Taking part in competitions has taught her so much as she learnt from those better than her.

Ashley has finished all her International Dance Teachers Association ballet exams, gaining a New Zealand scholarship for the 96 per cent she got for her Advance 2 exam.

She has two teaching certificates and is about to sit the final one allowing her to teach all grades. Classes with Robinson for this involved being taught how to teach and learning the syllabus.

Ashley was happy reaching the semifinals of Performing Arts Competitions Association of New Zealand (Pcanz) modern dance competition last month as she performed to her own choreography. She enjoys making up jazz and contemporary dances, skill she drew on to choreograph her college's winning entry in this year's StageChallenge Palmerston North.



LEONIE HAPETA
FOR PALMERSTON NORTH

GIVE PALMERSTON NORTH A STRONG VOICE IN JOHN KEY'S NATIONAL PARTY

P: 06 358 7885

E: leonie.hapeta@national.org.nz



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www.national.org.nz

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Authorised by Leonie Hapeta, 140 Fitzherbert Ave, Palmerston North