

BY JILL B. ADAIR

What started as a Personal Progress project has turned into a community Christmas tradition.

Let There Be Praise

During the summer of 2001, 17-year-old Tricia Hale had an idea, or a dream as she calls it, to put on a spiritual Christmas dance program that would portray the life of Christ.

She enlisted the help of three friends and fellow dancers (Anna Woolf, 17; Jill Hendrickson, 16; and Donelle Crandell, 16) at her high school in Mesa, Arizona, to turn the dream into reality.

The dancers were on the school's dance team but had taken issue in the past with music and costumes they felt were inappropriate or not in keeping with Church standards. They wanted to use their talents to present their testimonies of Christ by dancing to sacred music and wearing modest outfits.

The program that resulted would be an experience that strengthened their testimonies and was well-received by family, friends, and the community. Other young women took over after these girls graduated, making the spiritual experience an annual program.

Other dancers are invited to join them in planning, practicing, and performing. Although some of the dancers are not members of the Church, prayer, devotionals, and sharing testimonies are part of rehearsal time.

The free program, entitled "Let There Be Praise," portrays the life of Christ from birth to resurrection through scriptures, narration, slides, and lyrical dance to hymns and other spiritual music. It drew more than 500 people the first year, and the audience has since grown.

Clint W. Smith, president of the Mesa Kimball Stake, enjoys the performance.

"Dressed in white, these girls are so modest and pure and are able to share their talents and gifts in a way that is very powerful and appropriate," he says. "It is a wonderful experience for those who are in it and for those who see it."

McKenzi Fackrell, one of the group's past presidents, admits it was a lot of work to organize and head up the program. "But it was so worth it," she says. "It is such a testimony builder."



PHOTOGRAPHS BY SCOTT F. ADAIR





By participating in this special dance program, many girls in the Mesa, Arizona, area have been able to share their talents and their testimonies of Christ—and even complete a Personal Progress project.



After McKenzie graduated, Kelly Allen took over as co-president and chose a younger co-president, Brianna Barba, to work with her.

“I just love it,” says Kelly, who has danced since she was nine years old.

Even though Kelly keeps busy with the school’s dance group and making straight A’s, she’s able to keep her life organized.

“Being involved in this is a big blessing,” she says. “Somehow there is time for everything.”

Brianna has danced in the program since she was in eighth grade. “It has strengthened my testimony so much,” says the honor student, who is also involved in the school’s dance group and competition cheer squad.

In a devotional she told the dancers, “Christ can turn our shabby gifts into a beautiful miracle and a shining star.”

Brianna has been able to use the program for missionary experiences, inviting a friend to dance as Mary and another to perform a vocal solo for one of the dances.

“I knew they would be able to feel the Spirit and also bring their families so they would be able to share in this, too,” she says.

Brianna’s younger sister, Brittney, who performed for the first time as a sophomore, is one of many dancers who uses the experience as a Personal Progress project.

“I chose Individual Worth, because being in this has helped me learn so much about myself,” she says. “When you learn about Christ, you learn more about being a daughter of Heavenly Father and how much He loves you. My testimony has grown so much.”

The program ends with the song “How Great Thou Art,” and the dancers raise their arms in praise.

“The group has never done a curtain call because we want that to be the last thing the audience sees,” says Tricia Hale Campbell, who is now a dance teacher at her own studio and has continued to help the high school

students with the program. “This isn’t about the dancers. We feel grateful to use our talents in a spiritual way to focus on the Savior and we give that glory to the Lord.”

Sisters Kelsey, Kali, and Karissa Jarvis say that there are a lot of opportunities to sing or speak your testimony, but not a lot of places to dance your testimony.

“It lets others know that I do have a testimony,” says Kelsey.

Older sister Kali agrees. “You know how you feel bearing your testimony or having a great spiritual experience with someone? It’s the same great feeling, but you get to share it with all these people in dance.”

Kim Hathcock has returned to perform after graduating. “It’s one thing that makes Christmas meaningful for me,” she says.

During high school she performed as Mary. “It really made my testimony grow,” she says. “I also feel like we’re doing service, because so many people who see it comment that this is what gets them into the real Christmas spirit.”

Christy Quintero is a member of a local Christian church. “I thought it would be a good experience to dance to Christian music,” she says. “I really like being with everybody; they are good examples to be around.”

Don Johnson, whose daughter, Aimee, has performed for several years, says he enjoys the “spirit-filled” program. “These girls are so busy themselves, but they sacrifice to put this on so we can feel the Spirit,” he says. “That’s very Christlike.”

Drama teacher Sandy Stones of the Mesa Kimball Stake is the faculty sponsor for the club and is on hand when the girls practice.

“It’s an honor and privilege for me to sponsor the group,” she says. “They are a light to the school and community.” **NE**

