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Panel to Discuss Struggles, Successes of Professional Dance

By Sophie Braccini



Ballet dancer Erika Johnson (right) with a fellow dancer Photo provided

Area to join a smaller San Francisco dance company, and registered in the Saint Mary's College LEAP program that allows professional ballet dancers to pursue higher education while continuing their careers. "You are hired between the age of 18 and 19, then you dance for 10 to 15 years, then what?" asked the young woman. "LEAP is a way to get a higher liberal arts education, studying the classics and working around dance schedules."

Johnson stopped dancing for three years to become a nurse, but recently returned to dance for Diablo Ballet.

An earlier panel discussion is scheduled at 10:30 a.m. April 5 at the Lafayette Senior Center, 500 St. Mary's Rd.

The Academy Award winning movie *Black Swan* spurred a new curiosity about the demands of being a professional dancer, says Diablo Ballet dancer Erika Johnson. A graduate of the Saint Mary's College LEAP (Liberal Education for Arts Professionals) program, Johnson will be part of a panel of professional dancers who will discuss their personal stories of struggle and success as part of "Inside the Dancer's Life: *Black Swan* & Beyond" from 6:30 to 7:30 p.m. Thursday, April 5 at the Moraga Library.

"We'll talk about the discipline required for professional artists, the years of training, the travels, the injuries," said Johnson, "then we will show examples of live performances on DVD." The discussion will be moderated by Diablo Ballet Artistic Director Lauren Jonas.

The presentation will be followed by a question and answer period. "Previous audiences have been very curious about this unusual job," said Johnson. "They wanted to know how we felt about the movie, if we go the gym, if we eat Twinkies. We love all the funny questions."

Johnson had an interesting professional path. Raised in Marin County, Johnson was hired by a large ballet company in Texas at age 18. She later returned to the Bay

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