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**Ballet for the masses**  
**Piedmont Dance Theatre presents ‘user-friendly’  
concert in Village Park**

The Piedmont Dance Theatre’s third annual outdoor summer concert will be something of a homecoming for Courtney Conner. Conner, who was once a student at the theatre, will bring her ballet career full circle as she returns to her roots to perform; this time as a professional with the Cincinnati Ballet.

“It’s fun,” Conner said of returning to perform as part of the event. “It’s a good experience. When you start off with a company, you don’t get solos. It’s close to home, so I get excited to visit family, too.” It’s also a good way to stay in shape while taking a break from her performances in Cincinnati, she added.

Conner will join 10 other professional dancers from across the country and members of the Piedmont Dance Theatre’s Youth Ensemble, who range in age from 13 to 17, on stage for the concert.

The theatre is recognized as the only nonprofit dance company serving Cabarrus and Rowan counties and surrounding area.

“There’s a stereotype with a ballet company,” said Rebecca Massey Wiley, founder and co artistic director.

“We’re trying to present it in a way that lots of people will enjoy. If they don’t like the whole program, that’s fine, but I bet they’ll find something that really moves them.

As such, the performance includes a wide variety of individual ballet pieces. The show’s opening act, an 18<sup>th</sup> century classical piece, will be the traditional ballet most people are used to seeing. The closing, a piece by co-artistic director and Wiley’s husband, Daniel Wiley, will be much different, he said.

Entitled “Canvas No. 1”, the closing act will be a world premiere of Wiley’s interpretation of music and lyrics by Ray Charles.

“I’m more literal and he’s not,” Rebecca said. “We’ve got everything you could possibly want in a dance program. I wanted that kind of program because people call all the time and ask, “What’s modern dance? What’s this? What’s that?” So we want to show them.

The show, which should last about an hour and 15 minutes, has done well in the past, bringing in an estimated 1,000 people last year. It is ideal for those new to ballet or for children, Rebecca said, in large part because of the atmosphere created in the outdoor amphitheatre in Village Park.

“It’s an excellent way to introduce children to dance because they’re not confined to a seat,” she said. “They’re not required to be in a bow tie. You can come and go as you please. It’s very user-friendly.”

With that in mind, she did suggest bringing a lawn chair or blanket and perhaps a snack.

Despite the more laid back surroundings, the audience can expect top-notch performances from some ballet's best, Daniel said.

"We're lucky," he said. "With our backgrounds, we know some of the best of the best, and that's what we want to give our audience. It's nothing watered down."

But the audience members aren't the only one's benefiting from the event. Dancing alongside professionals is a great confidence boost for the Piedmont Dance Theatre dancers.

"It's a challenge. It's a motivational tool, and it's the 'wow' factor," Daniel said. "We're trying to provide the kids with what we didn't have (getting to work alongside professionals at an early age)."

