

JUNE 15, 2011
By: Chanel Laguna

A Passion for Dance



ADF student Chris Bell warms up by stretching before dance class. Photo by Corliss Pauling

Durham, NC - Chris Bell stands in a neutral position on a black mat; his arms swing from side to side and his legs begin to make their way into the air. This is the height of an American Dance Festival Tuesday rehearsal at Southgate Gym.

For Bell, the long road to the ADF class started with a hamburger.

The San Antonio native was only 5 when his mother enrolled him into dance courses. “I didn’t want to go. I was bribed with Burger King,” Bell said.

Since then, he has developed a passion for ballet and modern dance and received a full scholarship to attend the six-and-a-half week program.

“Any artist or professional can understand the need for training, and this is some of the best training you can get in the world,” Bell said, during an interview between classes.

“Any artist or professional can understand the need for training, and this is some of the best training you can get in the world,” Bell said, during an interview between classes.

“I was a little uptight at first but the program taught me that the only person you are competing with is yourself.”



Chris Bell and ADF dancers work in a preview class Tuesday. Photo by Chanel Laguna

This week, Bell joined some 400 dancers who arrived at Duke for ADF classes. Intense training, technique and composition are a few of the things dancers get to perfect and absorb through ADF.

Bell and the other students completed their last preview lessons Tuesday where they got a taste of the different dance classes available. Registration was Wednesday, and official classes begin Thursday.

At one of Bell’s preview classes Tuesday, dance instructors Mark Yaim and Ming Yang taught students techniques and choreographer Monica Bill Barnes discussed composition.

The students gracefully shift weight forward then back as the sounds of the drums and soft keys of the piano influence body movement. Although there was one drum playing, each dancer leaped and swayed to the beat of their drum.

Barnes divided the students in two lines and led them in structured improvisations. The role-playing -- acting out party scenes, taking on different characters -- added theatrical elements to the rehearsal.

“It’s about individuality and discovering what you like through this experience,” Bell said. “At ADF we are all working toward the same goal, and that’s to be an advocate for dance.”

Bell is one of many returning ADF students. In previous years, he met some heavy hitters in the dance field, including Don Redlich, Laura Dean, Martha Clark and Paul Taylor, who Bell said is his role model.

With dreams of being a professional dancer at a major American concert dance company, Bell looks back at how far he has come since his childhood growing up in an urban city in East San Antonio.

“People say ‘what’s your ticket out’ ... I say ... ‘dance’!”