

Martha's Vineyard

Lori E. Cunningham is the founder/director of the MV Dance Theatre.



You've had an active and extensive career in dance. What attracted you to ballet?

When I was a little girl, my dad always encouraged me to watch musicals with him. I think I saw every Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers movie ever produced. Ironically, I was a complete tomboy, so ballet didn't interest me at first. Tap dance, on the other hand, seemed like a lot of fun. But the school that I attended insisted that you take ballet in addition to any other genre of dance you chose to study. The challenge of the ballet classes really drew me in. Next thing I knew, I was enrolled in a pre-professional training program and spending my weekends in rehearsals for *Nutcracker*.

What was your goal in forming the MV Dance Theatre and the MV Ballet?

I grew up spending my summers on the Vineyard—my grandmother was a native islander. There was a school on island, but they had a very limited selection of classes, levels,

and teachers. I thought to myself how difficult it must be for the kids who lived here year round, not being able to have the competitive training and experiences that I was accustomed to. So I decided that one day, I would provide the opportunity to get the best possible training without having to travel to the mainland. In June of 2005, having achieved my original goal as founder of Dance Artists Unite-MV and former ballet mistress of the MV School of Ballet, I turned my focus toward my students' growing desire for more intense training. I started a performing company for the children of Martha's Vineyard to give the hand-selected members a taste of life as a professional dancer. MV Dance Theatre includes training in modern, jazz, tap, rep, and lyrical, in addition to rigorous ballet training.

What do you most like to stress to the students who study with you?

That they will only get out of their dancing (and life) what

CULTURAL CLIPS

Chamber Music Society Concerts

Don't miss out on the lovely concerts presented by the **Martha's Vineyard Chamber Music Society** this summer. **August 14 and 15** the **Great Lucarelli** will perform on the Oboe with accompaniment. Monday concerts are at the Old Whaling Church in Edgartown, and Tuesdays they are at the Chilmark Community Center. Note to students: your admission is free. For information, call 508-696-8055.

Delightful Dance

For one night only, **August 17**, world-renowned dancer **Lorraine Graves** will appear at the **Performing Arts Center**, as presented by Habitat for Humanity of Martha's Vineyard. Accompanied by some of the dancers from the Dance Theatre of Harlem, Graves is sure to present an amazing performance. For information or to purchase tickets in advance, call 508-696-4646.

Musical Mondays at Featherstone

Featherstone Center for the Arts wants nothing more than to entertain you. They succeed with Musical Mondays. Catch one of their last performances of the summer on **August 21** and listen to **Bruce MacNelly and Nick Thorne**. For information, call 508-693-1850 or visit www.featherstonearts.org.

spotlight on the performing arts

they put in to it. If they decide that they want to work and be part of our disciplined and demanding group, then they have to be committed. They cannot allow themselves to be bogged down by frustration or the demanding physical challenges of dance. I stay in touch with many of my former students. Those who stuck with it have gone on to achieve great success in all facets of their lives.

As a nonprofit, is it a struggle to balance the art with the need to raise money?

I think that it is hard for most people to appreciate the amount of money, time, and effort that it takes to put on a dance production. To do one weekend of a full-length ballet like *Nutcracker* costs almost \$15,000 up front. As the artistic director of MVDT, I want to believe that if I stay focused on the art and the development of the young dancers, the funding will come. But, it is a catch-22. Without the funding, it is very difficult to produce the dance concerts that give these

young men and women the exposure that they need. Like all nonprofits, we are praying for an angel, someone who believes in what we are doing and wants to make a large donation to help us meet our financial goals.

How do you envision the future of the MV Dance Theatre?

The MV Dance Theatre performing company is already raising the bar of excellence and audience expectations on the Vineyard. Having said that, I would like to expand the troupe to include even more young men and woman and be able to perform at least one full-length ballet a year as well as our original repertory program. I also plan to incorporate more guest choreographers and professional dancers for the children to work with.—*Andrew Cunningham*

For more information, contact the MV Dance Theatre at 508-360-5313 or visit www.MVDanceTheatre.com.

Pianist Russell Sherman

Arts and Society of Martha's Vineyard will feature acclaimed pianist **Russell Sherman** on **September 7**, at Our Lady Star of the Sea Church. The program will feature the music of Robert Schumann. A percentage of the proceeds will go to Hospice of Martha's Vineyard. For information, call 508-696-0539 or visit www.artsandsociety.org.

The Reel Life

Featuring films from around the country and around the world, the **World Film Festival on Martha's Vineyard** will be an eye-opening event. **September 14-17** will present four full days of real life stories and films. There will also be workshops and panels for an inside look at the films. For information, call 508-696-9369 or visit www.mvfilmsociety.com.

Grange Hall Art and Crafts

Thursdays and Sundays in West Tisbury is the place to be for the arts. **Sundays until October 1** and **Thursdays until August 24**, the historic Grange Hall will present a plethora of artisans displaying their work, at the **10th Annual Vineyard Artisans Summer Festival**. This is the only weekly, juried show where visitors can see and purchase work from the artisans themselves. For information and a full schedule, visit www.vineyardartisans.com.