

Kampala Ballet & Modern Dance School



ROYAL BUSINESS

Her Royal Highness Sylvia Nagginda, the Nnabagereka (Queen) of Buganda, has set up her first business, Kampala Ballet and Modern Dance School (KB&MDS). The school started in August last year, with Enterprise Uganda playing a vital role in its establishment, and was officially launched on November 11, 2004. The Enterprise interviewed the Nnabagereka at the school premises on Plot 34C Kyadongo Road in Nakasero about her project and below are the excerpts:

You are the promoter of this school which teaches classical ballet dance. Are you also a ballerina (a person who dances ballet)?

I am not one of them! I used to see ballet performances on TV and in magazines when I was still young and I admired them. Unfortunately I never had the opportunity of being exposed to ballet early in life.

I wanted my daughter (Katrina Ssangalyambogo) to learn ballet. I was guided to two instructors, one an Italian lady who held ballet lessons in Nakasero and the other an American. So I took up the Italian lady in Nakasero. During the time that I searched for ballet instructors I realised there was a need for an established school.

I talked to a number of people trying to get their opinion on the idea of setting up a ballet school. Almost all of them thought it was a great idea. A formal feasibility study among city schools confirmed this thinking. My research found that the need was there and the demand was there. And here we are today!

As the founder of this school, what precisely is your work currently?

At this stage we are still working to set up a firm foundation for the school; and I have the overall responsibility to ensure that the process is moving in the right direction.

Are you involved in its administration, for instance?

My work is to ensure that the school is taking the direction it should take. It is also about conducting work professionally, good administration and management.

We are dealing with children. So the environment must be nurturing and conducive to children. The school should groom children so that whatever professions they take up, we in future get better teachers, doctors, nurses... A child who has undergone classical ballet training is different; the concentration, self-confidence and discipline are commendable.

As a person who is part of a cultural institution, how did you resolve the apparent contradictions between the concept of ballet and the traditional perceptions about dancing in Buganda, the culture that you represent?

Dance is part of culture. All over the world – east, west, north and south – have their own dance concepts and styles. So I don't think dancing should be looked at only in the light of one's own community. In Buganda, we celebrate with dance and we are used to our own kiganda dance here – it is very festive.

People from other cultures may not appreciate it; another community might think it is not decent; some people may not be comfortable with all the shaking around the waist! What I am doing is to simply introduce our children to another kind of dance, from another culture, a dance that is fun as well as beneficial to the bodies and minds of our children. This school is starting as a pioneer project, but with time we might have more schools coming up. What do you think is the likely impact of your idea on the perceptions traditional Baganda have about dancing and its cultural concept? It is all about understanding the benefits of classical ballet. Our interest is to help in building a good foundation in a child. We want kids to benefit. Children who have undergone ballet classes tend to do very well in life. They are more focused, confident, disciplined and have more successful careers. If you can succeed in instilling good values in a child, then you are looking at having better teachers, better doctors... That is why we are looking at recognised international institutions that are experienced in the art of ballet to help us get it right.

From the broader sense, what benefits, apart from those that accrue to the children of course, is this project bringing to you as a person, to Buganda Kingdom and to the country?

Uganda will benefit in many ways, especially once more similar schools are set up in different parts of the country. Kampala Ballet and Modern Dance School is providing employment to Makerere University graduates, particularly those from the department of Music, Dance and Drama (MDD).

Your focus seems to be on children, does it mean adults can't learn ballet?

Our primary focus is on children. However, we also have modern dance classes for both children and adults who are interested in modern dance. This year (2005) we are starting adult classes in tap, hip hop, and other forms of dance. Ballet is highly technical; it requires a lot of discipline. Modern dance and Hip-Hop are easier forms of dance because they are not as technical. It is easier to learn ballet when you are still young, and progress as you grow up. The pre-ballet age ranges from 3-4 years of age where they are only taught rhythm and movement; when they reach 5 years they are taught the beginning of ballet techniques; at 8 years, they learn basic ballet positions, turns and balancing, and so on. That is how it goes; it is better when started at an early age, from about three years. The nursery and primary school age is the most appropriate.

What has it taken you in terms of resources, time and effort to start this school, and what do you think it will cost you to take it where you want it to be?

You really need to be determined to realise your vision. You have to find the right people to work with. I was lucky to get a perfect team including Enterprise Uganda, which has been very instrumental in helping me put up this school.

What precisely did Enterprise Uganda do for you?

They carried out the feasibility study and wrote the business plan. They were very instrumental because they didn't just write out a business plan and handed it to us, but have been working with us to ensure that things are moving in the right direction. They are actually still helping us.



How did you come to team up with Enterprise Uganda?

As I was doing my research, I consulted with Dr Maggie Kigozi of Uganda Investment Authority (UIA). She really liked the idea and referred me to Enterprise Uganda to assist in setting up this project. Mr Charles Ocici (Enterprise Uganda Executive Director) and his organisation have done a wonderful job for us.

This is the first formal classical ballet school in Uganda. Besides the schools in South Africa, do we have any other around the region and Africa?

The world over classical ballet is quite popular. Ballet goes way back to 1300-1400 or earlier. It is very popular in Europe and America. In Africa, I know in South Africa it is well developed. Kenya and Zimbabwe also have it, but I am not so sure about other (African) countries. During my research, I mostly looked at South Africa because that is where ballet is most developed in Africa.

That seems to explain why your instructors came from South Africa!

Yes, our Technical Advisor is from South Africa. She has a ballet school in Pretoria. We now have two foreign instructors, a South African and a Russian; and three three local trainees.

There is a growing concern about deteriorating morals in society. Is there a way this kind of training could help groom children in a better way, into responsible people?

Ballet is very useful. It helps build the self-confidence in children and hopefully as they grow up, they will be able to say 'no' to bad company. They won't easily be swayed by peer pressure which usually leads to drugs, irresponsible sex and other evils. If one has confidence in themselves, they can make decisions on their own, without influence from bad characters. Therefore the one or two hours they spend here are very important for their future.

Over this short period you have been around, what has the response been like so far?

The response has been very encouraging. When we just started last August, during the second term holidays which lasted two weeks, we had 79 children. During third term last year we enrolled over 300 children.

How many schools are you in partnership with?

We are working very closely with schools, suggesting to them to include ballet on their list of extra-curricula activities. During the third term of 2004, we had six schools participating. We also had more children from the extended programme, where parents register their

children directly here and they bring them for lessons in the evenings after school and during weekends.

We have already registered 14 schools for the first term of 2005. The final number is likely to be around 20 schools. The launch ceremony itself (November 11) was also an excellent opportunity of exposure for us. Ever since the launch, the children want to be like their friends who came from South Africa (for the occasion). They really admired the South African ballerinas!

What does it take for one to have a child attend ballet lessons here?

It is simple. By coming here and obtaining information, and registering your child. If you want to enrol under the school programme, you go through the child's school.

It sounds as if it is for the elite; how much does it cost?

You can't really put a price to the long term benefits of ballet. In any case, some people actually think we are too cheap. This year we have been charging Shs 55,000 per term, but beginning the new year we are increasing it to Shs 65,000, which is still very affordable. That is quite affordable. The only other cost is the dance wear, which is at about Shs 100,000 for girls and even less for boys.

You have mostly been involved in charity work, but this is now a business enterprise. Does this reflect a change of focus in your work? You are now in business, aren't you?

Yes, this is a profit generating project. Most of my work has been in charity, under the Nabagereka Development Trust, which has several programmes in education and health for children, youth and women. I am also Goodwill Ambassador for UNFPA, among other patronage activities.

Nevertheless, this project fits very well in the overall objectives of my charitable work. And also, a percentage of proceeds from this project will go towards supporting the charity work of the Trust. The overall focus remains the same – children, education and health.

What have you so far been able to achieve under the Trust?

The Nabagereka Development Trust was founded in 2000. It has an 11-member board of trustees and a secretariat at Radiant House, Kampala Road. The focus has mainly been on children, youth and women, and in the areas of health and education.

Currently, under the Trust, we are in the process of putting up a vocational school in Wakiso and an Early Education Centre in Kisenyi. We have also started construction of a dormitory for the Kampala School for the Physically Handicapped; we are also assisting Sanyu Babies' Home, and we are implementing a nutrition project in Makindye.

You definitely have a lot to attend to! How does your typical day go?

Well, do I have a typical day...? My day begins with my daughter; Ssanga wakes me up every morning! (laughter). She is now three years and six months. She goes to pre-school. My work is usually programmed in advance; I do different things on different days. My main office is at Bulange (Mengo), but I also work a lot from home (Kireka Palace).