

THINGS TO DO > MUSIC AND CONCERTS

New St. Paul dance class encourages caregivers to move with their babies

‘Being with other moms and letting baby run wild is always nice,’ one mom said



By **TALIA MCWRIGHT** | tmcwright@pioneerpress.com

UPDATED: October 3, 2024 at 5:07 p.m.

Mothers sway, bounce and crawl with their babies to the sounds of soothing music during new Babywearing Dance classes at a St. Paul nonprofit dance studio.

“As a mom or new parent, you end up falling into a pretty tight routine, and this brought us out of our routine,” said Allison Knigge, mom of 6-month-old Daisy.

The class at Young Dance studio is designed for parents and caregivers with babies up to a year old. It’s curated to promote bonding through movement and dance as caregivers move with their babies attached to them.

Babies that age are attached to and reliant on their caregivers. Artistic director Anat Chinn said Babywearing Dance class prompts caregivers and babies to engage in

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“A babywearing class is another opportunity for someone to connect with their child, for their child to connect with them and to find community,” Shinar said.

The class runs every Friday from 11:30 a.m. to 12:15 p.m. and will continue until the season ends in May. It is a drop-in class, meaning parents and caregivers can sign up online or show up in person with their baby whenever they'd like to join.

[Read More](#)

00:00

02:00

Each class costs \$13, though scholarships are available for more accessibility; financial need is assessed during the registration process.

Executive director and babywearing class instructor Gretchen Pick has been with Young Dance for more than 20 years. She begins the class with caregivers and babies on the ground, stretching and engaging in breath work.

‘Being with other moms’

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Ten-month-old August Lancaster gets his legs moving as he and his mom, Lauren, take a breather during a Babywearing Dance class at Young Dance in St. Paul. (John Autey / Pioneer Press)

"I think the moving, the inhaling and exhaling together was really nice," Lauren Lancaster, mom of 10-month-old August, said. "He seemed very soothed with the swaying and the spinning, kind of taking it all in."

For this class, Pick's style of dance and music choice is modern, contemporary and slow-moving.

When needed, like during last Friday's session when high-energy babies like 10-month-old Freddy and 11-month-old Noa were crawling and babbling about, she'll change the music to something with a bouncy feel, like Israel Kamakawiwo'ole's "Somewhere Over the Rainbow."

"Being with other moms and letting baby run wild is always nice," Lily O'Hara-Brantner, mom of baby Freddy, said.

The 45-minute class ends with 15 minutes of social time for both the caregivers and babies. Six mothers attended Friday's class with one baby each and, for many of them, social time was their favorite part of the class.

Kayla Yeh, who brought her 4-month-old, Sawyer, said the class was her baby's first time around other babies.

"Just seeing her interact with other babies, smile, enjoy it and to also connect with other moms was my favorite part of the experience," Yeh said.

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“Connecting with other moms has been super helpful ... having spaces like this to connect with other people going through similar life changes,” baby Noa’s mom, Emily Ness, said.

Shinar and Pick designed the class so that caregivers could not only connect with their child, but also be present with their own bodies.

“Caring for our baby doesn’t take away from ourselves, but actually grounds us into ourselves,” Pick said.

Where the idea came from

Shinar imagined the idea for a babywearing dance class in the spring after seeing videos of parents online doing jazzercise with babies strapped to them. She said it gave her the inspiration for Young Dance to put their own spin on a babywearing class.

“I think that as parents, we’re always looking for ways to connect with our babies,” Shinar said.

Pick and Shinar, who’ve both been dance instructors at Young Dance, said it’s been very common throughout the years for their employees to wear their own babies while teaching a class. They themselves did it when their own children were babies, saying the experience felt natural and has become a part of the studio’s culture.

“In my role as executive director, I feel it’s important to foster this culture where people coming to work can value their families,” Pick said. “Their families don’t have to be second to work ever.”

What makes Young Dance unique?

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Gretchen Pick, bottom left, leads a Babywearing Dance class. (John Autey / Pioneer Press)

Young Dance’s programming integrates people with all abilities and disabilities, grouping them by age and not skill level or performance. Shinar said people can join at any age without feeling like they’ve “missed their window.”

“We believe that dance is for everybody, and we really believe that,” Shinar said.

Shinar and Pick said that there is no right type of dancer or dance form and instead, everyone deserves to experience a dance education.

“We believe that everybody can dance, everybody is capable of creative expression, has something to say, and we want to give them the tools,” Pick said.

Young Dance has two other classes specifically tailored for children and caregivers: Dance Together for ages 1 through 3 and Family Dance for ages 1 through 5.

From October through November, Young Dance is doing a five-week workshop, partnering with [Stuart Pimsler Dance and Theater](#), called “[Family in Motion](#),” for children ages 8 and up, along with their caregiver.

Throughout the fall months, the [Young Dance Performing Company](#), a group of 22 kids ages 7 to 18, will work collaboratively with local professional choreographers to create original routines and perform at venues around the Twin Cities.

“There’s powerful programming happening here at Young Dance,” Pick said.

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Babywearing Dance class

- **When:** Fridays from 11:30 a.m. to 12:15 p.m. (season ends in May)
- **Where:** Young Dance Studio, 655 N. Fairview Ave., St. Paul
- **Cost:** \$13 per class (scholarships available)

Originally Published: October 3, 2024 at 5:57 a.m.

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