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Mission Hill Native Pursues Her Dreams Of Dance For A Higher Purpose

BY DEREK BARTOS
derek.bartos@yankton.net

Last December, Elisa Olson had one of the scariest experiences a professional ballet dancer can endure when a car ran over her foot. "I didn't know if I'd ever dance again," said Olson, a Mission Hill native. However, a week later, her foot was healed and she was back dancing for her company. While many people might say she was lucky, Olson believes it was a demonstration of a power about which she testifies every time she dances.

"It was a miracle that God healed it," she said. "He's the one who can give and take away anything, and I'm thankful He's given me the ability to dance."

Olson, a home-schooled student who graduated high school in 2010, has spent the past 2 1/2 years using that ability to spread the Gospel through dance, performing for Christian ballet companies. She is currently in her second year of training with Ballet Magnificat! in Jackson, Miss.

"That's my passion in life — to spread the Gospel to everyone I come in contact with, and to use the gift He's given me to point others to Him to give back for what He's given me," she said.

Olson was first introduced to ballet at age 7 when her mother enrolled her in the Academy of Dance in Yankton. Even though she was young, she instantly caught the eye of the academy's instructor, Dorota Dannenbring.

"From the first day I met her, I knew she was born to be a dancer," Dannenbring said. "She has a gift, and she has the dedication."

Despite putting tremendous effort into her gift during the next 10 years, Olson said she didn't take her dancing too seriously until her final year of high school.

"It was just a really fun hobby for me," she said.

That changed in the fall of 2009 when Olson saw Ballet Magnificat! perform "The Scarlet Chord" during a tour stop in Yankton.

"I was inspired by how they used dancing to bring glory to God," she said. "In a lot of the secular ballet companies, it's very much focused on the dancer and who they can become. Ballet Magnificat! has an outward focus, focusing on reaching people with the Gospel and glorifying God through excellence in the art."

"That's when I saw that dance could have a purpose and be used effectively in ministry."

Wanting to help spread Ballet Magnificat!'s message, Olson auditioned for the ballet company following graduation. After gaining a year of experience dancing with the Light of the World ballet in Syracuse, N.Y., she entered into the Ballet Magnificat! training program.

As a member of the highest level of the training program, Olson had the opportunity this past fall to tour with the Women of Faith Conference, which visits cities throughout the nation to encourage and support women. She performed in front of an average crowd of 10,000 people in various cities, including Dallas; St. Paul, Minn.; Sacramento, Calif.; and Kansas City, Mo.

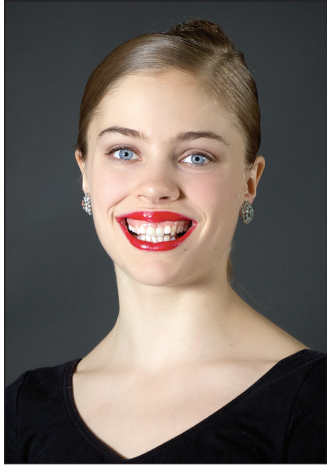
"It was an exciting time to meet a lot of women and to encourage them to walk with the Lord," Olson said.

Olson next will be touring with Ballet Magnificat! in Honduras, where she will perform at various venues and help teach ballet workshops.

Dannenbring, who attended the St. Paul performance, said she couldn't be prouder of her former student. "Seeing her perform in front of thousands of people really made me truly realize how far she's gone," she said.

Dannenbring said Olson's journey should serve as inspiration to others, as it shows what can be done with strength and dedication. "If you reach up high, anything is possible," she said.

You can follow Derek Bartos on Twitter at twitter.com/d_bartos



■ **"That's my passion in life — to spread the Gospel to everyone I come in contact with, and to use the gift He's given me to point others to Him to give back for what He's given me."**


ELISA OLSON



Mission Hill native Elisa Olson is pursuing her dream of dancing and spreading the Gospel. She now performs with the Christian dance company Ballet Magnificat!, based in Jackson, Miss. Olson said it was seeing a performance by the group in Yankton in 2009 that showed her she could use her dancing "to bring glory to God." (Courtesy Photo)

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