



A Drove of Dancers Hits Downtown Norfolk: GSA Hosts the Regional High School Dance Festival

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If you're strolling around Granby Street this weekend, you might run into packs of aspiring dancers.



You'll know them by the buns in their hair, the pink and black tights peeping out from under their sweats, the jazz and ballet shoes hanging out of their bulging backpacks, and the way some of them can't seem to avoid dancing along the sidewalks. On March 16 through 19, the Governor's School for the Arts (GSA) will host the 12th Regional High School Dance Festival. The festival brings together more than 1,000 guests from 57 high school dance programs and 44 colleges and universities. The students perform for each other, attend classes and workshops taught by dance educators from around the country, and participate in college fairs and auditions.

“Bringing together kids and teachers in a creative and inclusive way is the best,” says GSA assistant director Deborah Thorpe, who is the director of the Regional High School Dance Festival.

Thorpe says GSA has hosted the event every other year for the past 24 years, and for the past ten years the event has happened in Norfolk. In 1992, when Thorpe was the head of GSA’s dance department, she and her students were part of the first national festival in Philadelphia. Since the national festival takes place every two years, Thorpe wanted to create a regional festival that would be connected to the national event and held on alternate years to give dancers from nearby states more chances to come together.



One of the highlights of the weekend will be the return of GSA alumnus Gabriel Hyman, a company dancer with Ailey II. Ailey II is kicking off the festival on Thursday with two performances for festival participants, so Hyman will be performing again on the Roper stage where he once danced as a high school student. The company is the repertory and outreach arm of Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater. In partnership with the Virginia Arts Festival, GSA will bring Ailey II to schools for lecture demonstrations before the company’s festival performance.

The dancers, teachers, and college representatives who attend the festival will be staying at the Marriott Waterside Hotel, the Sheraton, and the Courtyard Marriott. The festival events will take place at the Marriott, the GSA building, the TRDance

Center, and the Roper Performing Arts Center.

“I love hosting the regional dance festival because the joys of dancing are still what I am about,” says Thorpe. “And I get to share our wonderful school and city as well.”