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Brooklyn dance teacher Cynthia King has special passion for animal welfare and advocacy

BY AMY SACKS
SPECIAL TO THE NEWS

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Aspiring dancers from the Cynthia King Dance Studio learn about animal compassion on road trip to the Woodstock Farm Animal Sanctuary, in upstate N.Y.

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When "Black Swan" star Natalie Portman requested a pair of vegan ballet slippers to wear for her recent Vogue photo shoot, the go-to source was Brooklyn dance teacher Cynthia King.

The former professional dancer sells the nation's only "cruelty free" ballet slippers - made without leather or other animal products - an act en pointe with her passion for animal welfare and advocacy.

"I was 10 when I made the connection between the animals that I loved and what was sitting on my plate," said the longtime vegan, who teaches dance styles ranging from ballet and modern to hip hop and b-boy at the Cynthia King Dance Studios on Prospect Ave.

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In addition to her studio's "no-leather" dance shoe policy, many of the pieces performed by her students - ranging in age from 3 to 80 - reflect her philosophy of compassion toward all animals.

Last summer, she took eight carloads of aspiring dancers on a road trip to the Woodstock Farm Animal Sanctuary, where they were awed by the expressive personalities of the farm's diverse residents, including Olivia, a three-legged goat who has since died.

"They quickly found out that goats and pigs think tutus are tasty," said King, a devoted supporter of the 20-acre sanctuary in upstate Willow, near Woodstock, which provides a safe-haven for more than 200 abandoned and abused animals.

Many of the farm's goats, chickens, turkeys, sheep, cows and pigs were rescued from New York City slaughterhouses and found abandoned on the streets.

Tomorrow, from 4 p.m. to 6 p.m., King invites the community to "A Children's Celebration of Farm Animals," a free event aimed at raising awareness for animals through interactive music, dance and poetry.

Brooklyn author Maya Gottfried will read poems from her children's book, "Our Farm: By the Animals of Farm Sanctuary," while King leads children through interactive dances that portray the animals. Fellow vegan Brooklynite Michael Harren will perform the accompanying music.

"We're trying to teach kids about the spiritual and amazing lives of farm animals through the arts," said Gottfried, who based her poems on real-life animals that reside at Farm Sanctuary, one of the nation's leading animal protection organizations.

Hilda the sheep, Gabriella the chicken, and a goat named Clarabell, are among the hundreds of rescued, injured and abandoned farm animals that live at one of Farm Sanctuary's two locations - in upstate Watkins Glen and in Orland, Calif.

Gottfried, who lives in Park Slope with her rescued kitties Lucian and Bunny, volunteered at the New York farm and personally got to know the cast of characters who speak to the readers through her poems.

Farm Sanctuary and the Woodstock Farm Animal Sanctuary are among a handful of nonprofit respites for farm animals that rely strictly on donations. All of the studio's proceeds from book sales tomorrow will be donated to Farm Sanctuary.

Participants and attendees will also be treated to kid-friendly vegan "mcnuggets" and other meatless treats, graciously catered by the V-Spot in Brooklyn.

For more info on the free event at Cynthia King Dance Studios, go to cynthiakingdance.com.

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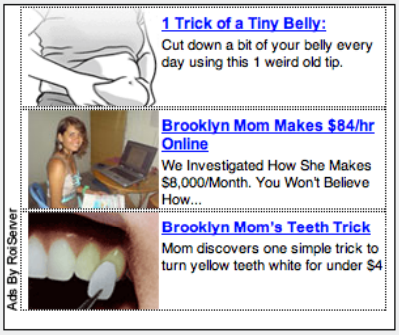

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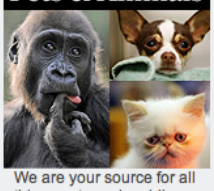

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