

This is a series of four features about the 16 graduating seniors at the Fergus Falls School of Dance.

Written by Mindy Christianson

Cristina Ehlers

Cristina has been dancing for 15 years. Her current classes include modern and jazz, and she has also participated in tap, ballet and hip hop. Her favorite dance was an upbeat jazz piece called “Wepa.” She loves how FFSD has helped her learn different ways to move her body.

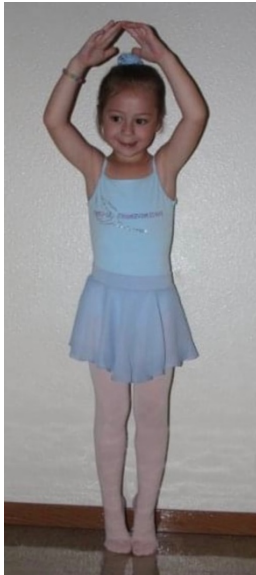
Outside of dance, Cristina works as a CNA, and she participates in the color guard, synchronized swimming, orchestra, and choir. She plans to go to college to become a veterinarian, and she hopes to continue dancing throughout her life. She’d like to thank Mary Pettit for always being there for her.



Savannah Miller

Savannah's 7.5 years of dance include jazz, modern, and hip hop. Her favorite thing about dancing is "being able to transform emotion into dancing and letting it all come together piece by piece." Like Cristina, her favorite dance is "Wepa," and she also enjoyed improvisational choreography in Molly's classes. Savannah fondly remembers having to run off stage to take hair bands off her wrist because Ramona noticed them.

Savannah works as a barista and plans to attend M State to complete her general classes. She also hopes to be a choreographer as a side job in the future.

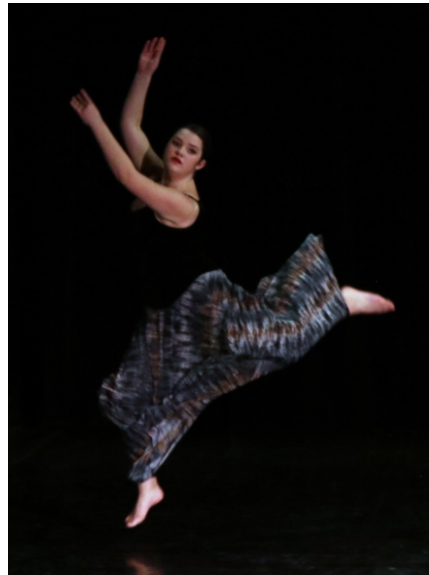


Savannah Miller then and now

Maria Myhre

Maria has been dancing for 14 years, and her styles have included ballet, tap, jazz, modern, and hip hop. She says, “My favorite thing about FFSD is the community we’ve built and how we’ve created a space where everyone feels like they can be themselves.” A favorite memory is attending a production of Swan Lake, where she fell asleep and has yet to live it down.

Maria also participates in choir, band, and knowledge bowl, and she works as a barista at Toast. She will be attending Gustavus Adolphus college to major in political science, and she will also continue to take dance classes there. Maria would like to give a shoutout to Mary Pettit, who “is amazing. Her choreography absolutely emulates who she is as a person, just so fun and upbeat. She is extremely kind and always there for us no matter what. I have learned so much from her.”



Maria Myhre then and now

Birgitta Nycklemoe

Birgitta, known as “Gitta” in the studio, has danced for 14 years, participating in ballet, pointe, modern, jazz, tap, and hip hop. She says, “I love getting to think creatively and move my body, and FFSD creates such a safe and family-like community.” A fun memory includes Mona’s studio closet, which contains a multitude of objects to help explain concepts. In middle school, “Mona carried out a beaver skull in the middle of a ballet class - none of us were expecting that.” Birgitta loves inventory day, when they go through all the costumes in storage. It is an extra fun experience because Ramona made many of the costumes herself.

In addition to dance, Gitta loves music, participating in choir and orchestra. She will be attending Concordia College in Moorhead this fall. She hopes to take ballet classes in the area as well.



Corinn Olson

Starting in 2016 at FFSD, Corinn (or Cori, as her friends call her), has participated in ballet, pointe, jazz, modern, tap, repertoire, and hip hop. She explains, “My favorite thing about FFSD is the sense of family.” Like many others, a favorite dance number is “Wepa” by Gloria Estefan.

Corinn also works at the YMCA as a lifeguard and at KT British Labs dog kennel. She will be attending Jamestown University in North Dakota to pursue a doctorate in physical therapy. She will also be working with the theatre program there to help with choreography for musicals. Corinn says, “I want to thank Mona for always going above and beyond, teaching us so much more than ballet. It is because of Mona sharing her knowledge of the human body that I am choosing to go into physical therapy.



Sophia Pawlowski

Sophia has been dancing for 14 years, including time in ballet, tap, pointe, modern, and jazz. She also teaches two levels of tap class. While not a favorite, a memorable experience was when everyone got a stomach bug in the middle of Dance and Dessert. On a brighter note, she says, "I love when all the dancers get together for notes during the spring show. I love sitting with my friends after warmup class!"

Sophia keeps quite busy with both teaching and taking dance classes, but she also works as a barista at Perks. She plans to attend the University of Minnesota Duluth, where she will major in integrated education and special education. She'd like to thank all her teachers at FFSD, including Mary Pettit, "because she brings so much love and laughter to class and has taught me so many life lessons."



Sophia Pawlowski then and now

Sloanne Petersen

Sloanne participates in ballet, jazz, and modern, and in the past she also participated in pointe and tap. While she can't remember her exact starting date, she says she's been dancing "since forever." A favorite memory is standing in the wings, watching the other dancers, while a less favorite but memorable occasion is "when a guy ran from the cops and came into the studio." The dance she will remember most is "Silent Night."

Sloanne loves being a part of the FFSD community and having a reason to move her body. Outside of dance, she works at Lundeen's. Sloanne plans to earn a degree in Biology at the University of North Carolina Greensboro. She thanks all her dance teachers for their time and hard work.



Solvie Smestad

A dancer since preschool, Solvie is currently taking modern and jazz classes. In the past she also participated in tap and hip hop. She says, "I always enjoy the spring show, but particularly last year's because it was the one right after two years off from Covid." A favorite dance is the senior number this year, as it is meaningful to both the dancers and teachers.

Solvie is very busy outside of dance. She is in volleyball, cross country skiing, color guard, knowledge bowl, National Honor Society, and student council. She will attend the University of Vermont for environmental science. Solvie states, "I'd love to stay thank you to Mary Pettit for being such a loving and encouraging role model. You have taught me so much about dance and how to live a life full of love."



Abby Strege

Abby has been dancing since first grade; her current classes include ballet and pointe, and her previous classes include modern and tap. She explains, “I love pointe the most “because I like how it challenges me to go out of my comfort zone.” A memorable moment was staying till 11 p.m. one night last spring to figure out spacing and lighting for a dance. Abby says, “I really enjoy the people at FFSD and the environment that they create.”

In addition to dance, she is on the Otter gymnastics team. She also coaches gymnastics and works at Companion Animal Hospital. She plans to attend South Dakota State University and major in animal science/pre veterinary medicine. Abby wants to give a special shout-out to Mona: “Thanks for being such a great teacher all these years!”



Caroline Stumbo

Caroline has been dancing for 14 years, and her classes have included ballet, tap, jazz, modern, and hip hop. Her favorite dance performance was “‘Liebeslieder’ because it was so pretty,” and she loves the whole spring show week. A less pleasant, but memorable moment nonetheless was when the Dance & Dessert cast all got the flu. Caroline says, “My favorite thing about FFSD is the community, where I am able to express myself and be creative.”

Outside of dancing, Caroline is a barista at Toast. Her future plans include college, but she is still undecided on where she will be. She also has yet to decide on taking dance classes in college, but she knows she will continue dancing no matter where she is. Caroline would like to thank all of her teachers for working so hard and being so giving.



Caroline Stumbo, then and now

Alyssa Winter

Alyssa is a 15-year veteran of FFSD, having taken tap, modern, ballet, pointe, jazz, and hip hop. She says, "There are so many amazing teachers at FFSD that teach us more than just dancing." Alyssa loves the Dance and Dessert shows, as well as seeing what might pop out of Ramona's closet next: "Mona's closet always has many random things in it. One time she even pulled out a beaver skull." As for her favorite show, she explains, "Although we all have very mixed emotions towards 'Snow,' I think it was a great dance. Yes, it was extremely stressful and chaotic, but it was fun to get closer with all of the girls."

Alyssa was also on the Otter football team, and she enjoys graphic design. She is attending the University of Minnesota Twin Cities for business and marketing. Alyssa would like to thank Ramona Jacobs: "She's amazing as a teacher and a person!"



Alyssa Winter, then and now

Brianne Zachary

Brianne has been dancing for 11 years; her current classes include modern and jazz and she used to participate in tap. She says, “I have a lot of fun memories, but a favorite is when the heat wasn’t working at the studio. We all wore jackets and leg warmers and cuddled up in the dressing room.” Brianne enjoys many aspects of FFSD: “I enjoy having a space to be authentic to however I’m feeling and having the support from the dancers and teachers. I also enjoy the sense of community at dance and being able to grow and learn from others.”

Outside of dance, Brianne enjoys singing. She plans to attend Concordia University in St. Paul where she will major in psychology. Brianne would like to give a shout out to one teacher in particular: “Mary has always been one of my biggest supporters and has really shaped my dance journey.”



Brianne Zachary, then and now

The Boys of FFSD

Written for the Journal by Mindy Christianson

Alex Jensen

Alex has participated in the boys' hip hop class for five years. A favorite memory is "throwing Oliver into the roof back in 8th grade." Alex enjoys dancing because it's a great way to spend time with friends and get his mind off things. He claims, "Dancing keeps me young, so I'm probably going to do it till I die."

Alex also participates in football, basketball, and track. He will attend Colorado State University, where he will be on the track team for throwing.



Joey Johnson

Joey has been dancing in hip hop for the past three years, and he also enjoys participating in the boy/girl dances. He was inspired to join by his sister Jacey, who was also a longtime student at FFSD. A favorite memory is his teacher Sara's quote book. His favorite dance is the number they are currently preparing for the spring show, but he is keeping the details a secret.

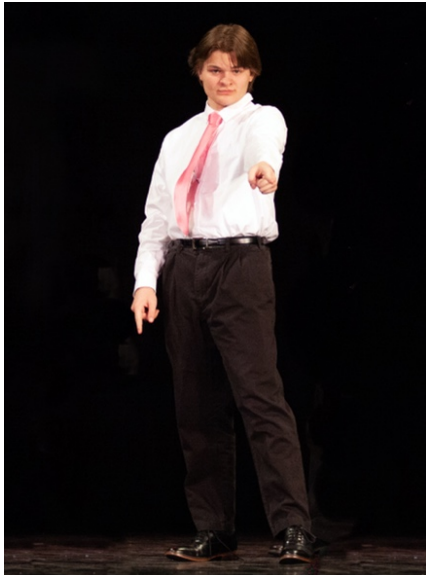
In addition to hip hop, Joey also participates in soccer, hockey, and tennis. His future plans? "Survive."



Ethan Leopold

Ethan is in his second year of hip hop and also participates in the boy/girl dances. All of his favorite dance memories include his friend Alex Jensen. Ethan explains, "My favorite thing about dancing is that it's good exercise and it's fun."

Outside of dance, Ethan plays tennis and soccer. He is a knowledge bowl team member and also works at the public library. He also enjoys reading comic books. Ethan will study history at Concordia College this fall.



Oliver Thorson

Oliver has been in hip hop class since eighth grade. His favorite number was the Boy Band Mashup in the 2022 spring show. While Oliver does not plan to continue dance classes after high school, he does promise to tear it up on the dance floor at weddings. He says, “My favorite thing about FFSD is seeing my friends, as well as the relationships I’ve made with teachers.”

Oliver is also on the cross country, Nordic ski, and track teams. He will be attending flight school to become a pilot. He has a special shout out for his teacher: “Sara, you are the best dance teacher ever.”

