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They tell tales of equality through ballet movements

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ENGALURU: Their feet rise in tandem and hands make rhythmic movements as ballet music fills the air. With enthusiasm and dexterity that can beat any professional, children, mostly from economically weaker sections, are busy polishing their skills to dance their way out of the shackles imposed on them.

Come October 3, 64 children will be all grace and poise as they don tutus and pointed shoes and perform as Pierrot Clowns in the ballet, the Spectacular Circus, in Koramangala. They include children of autorickshaw drivers, fruit and vegetable sellers and housekeepers.

Over 400 students, including children in the age group of 4 to 17, of the Lewis Foundation of Classical Ballet will perform at the event. The foundation selected the underprivileged children studying in a school run by Parikrma Humanity Foundation four years ago. Their first performance was in 2013.

"They have so much of raw energy, and we are trying to channelize it in the right direction. I have seen these children grow into confident and self-sufficient individuals right in front of my eyes. With ballet, you have to go beyond your limits physically, and these children are trying so hard to achieve it. They were shy and refused to even move in the beginning, but now they keep asking us to check their moves and correct them. The difference from when we started four years ago is incredible," said Yana Lewis, managing director of The Lewis Foundation.

Learning step by step: During the first year in 2012, imaginative stories were narrated through movements and mime to students. "They used to sit in circles around me and I would encourage them to move their hands to strengthen their back muscles. The first year was all about muscle work and flexibility," said Yana from London who has been dancing for the past 51 years.

In the second and third years, the focus was more on the technical aspects. Many techniques such as point and flex, arm lines and stretching postures were taught through rhymes and stories. The students were also taught about decision-making and music interpretation. "We could see some brilliant ballet dancers emerging out of this shy bunch of children," said Elina Wisung who has been working with Yana for the past 15 years.

The aim is to integrate them with mainstream children so that there will be no difference between them on stage, she said.