

Ballet — living like a nun can keep you young

By SANDY STOUTH

You work hard all your life, and what does it get you? For Christina Wanner, it's helped her look at least 10 years younger.

Twenty-three years of vigorous training as a ballet dancer helped enhance the youthfulness of the Bannerhill Drive resident.

"Involvement in life is what keeps you alive," says 40-year-old Mrs. Wanner. For relaxation, she sleeps. "I don't relax very much actually, although I like to do something in a relaxing way."

Mrs. Wanner, who moved to Mississauga last September, started training early, when she was 14. As one of the first dancers to be used professionally outside of the Royal Ballet, she started working in ballet companies when she was 16.

The London Ballet, Ballet De Tour Eiffel and Les Grandes Ballets Canadiennes are examples of the companies she worked with.

"Dancing was a very big part of my life," she says. "During that time I literally lived like a nun. Dancing is a tremendous and difficult task, that requires tremendous discipline."

When she was with the companies, classes would start at 9:30, then she would go into rehearsals, break for lunch at 1:30 be back by 2:30, and practice again till 6:30.

"If there was a performance that night, then we would go to the theatre. I was continually exhausted and broke." Her average earnings for a week was about \$70.

Although she devotes most of her time to attending to her four-year-old daughter Tara, she takes modern dancing lessons from the Toronto Dance Theatre two or three times a week, and paints.

"I've always painted also," says Mrs. Wanner, "I didn't go from one to the other. I took both at the same time when I went to high school in Ottawa."

Landscaping and portrait paintings are not her specialities, whereas she prefers abstract paintings.

"Even though I have exhibited all my life, I really paint for myself. I try to express my thoughts of the moment. If I would go into painting for a big gallery, I would have to produce a tremendous amount of work."

She is also very critical of her work. "I try not to hang too many of my paintings in my home. I destroy a lot because I'm not happy with them."

But painting has never brought her her livelihood. "It's just something I could do." In the past few years, she has been reassessing her ideas of painting. "Why do I have to paint for other people's standards. I couldn't just sit down and paint for other people. I'd rather paint for myself."

She also has very strong convictions of what makes a good dancer. "A good dancer is a good dancer is a good dancer. It's the training that makes a person excel Canada does not yet realize, understand or appreciate its wealth. The wealth is not in the earth, its on the earth, in the people. The trouble is that they don't yet know how to explore or help people who are interested in the arts."

Former leading ballet dancer, Christina Wanner, prefers painting for herself rather than for others. Her exhibition continues at Burnhamthorpe Library this month.

