

KidTribe Sweeps L.A.

Dance Party for Kids 5-10 Grows in Popularity

by Alex Miller



Kellee McQuinn wants to save the world, one dance move at a time.

The idea is simple: get kids together for a fun dance party and let their parents have a few hours for a date. McQuinn's KidTribe, which she bills as a "the hip-hoppin" dance party just for kids," started last year at the Santa Monica Place Mall, and it's already expanding to other locations. Ultimately, the 31-year-old entrepreneur would like to dot the globe with KidTribe venues because, as she says, it's about a universal message of fun, love and tolerance.

"We're in such a performance-oriented society, everything based on whether you're a winner or a loser," McQuinn says, sipping an herbal tea at Pat's Topanga Grill. "The bottom line here is having fun. There's a no-parent rule, so we can take kids out of their usual context and let them discover who they really are."

McQuinn, who says she danced in the womb as the daughter of a dance teacher, says her years of teaching taught her one thing about kids: They all loved the last 10 minutes of her class, when she let them "free" dance.

"They lived for it," she says. "So I thought, 'Why don't I create something like that?'"

When September 11 hit and McQuinn, like so many Americans, took a look at what she was doing and thought about how she might help the world be a better place, the idea for KidTribe crystallized, and the movement was born.

"It's my calling," she says. "I just asked myself how I could use my gifts to help the world."

A Mission

McQuinn, who took over her mother's studio at the tender age of 14, knows plenty about dance and dance instruction, but it's not necessarily those skills that make KidTribe such a success. The polar opposite of the stereotypical drill-sergeant children's instructor, McQuinn leads her tribe with a blazing smile, an all-encompassing warmth and enough energy and enthusiasm to outshine a cheerleading squad. The "tribe" moniker is not just a word: McQuinn wants kids to learn that mentality, to support and not insult or tease

one another. In her mind, if she can send her young charges back out into the world with the belief that they themselves are good, worthy and special, they'll spread that message.

It wouldn't be an exaggeration to say McQuinn sees herself as a latter day "Catcher in the Rye." She frowns on things like Britney Spears' pelvic grind ("She has ruined young girls"), the sex and violence kids are exposed to and anything else that grows children up too fast.

"I'm all about kids and preserving their innocence," she says.

With that in mind, McQuinn has created a program that takes kids out of what she calls "validate-me" mode and puts them into a safe, fun environment where they can move their bodies and explore the joy of dance and music. Along with the dance, the music and the positive atmosphere, there's all kinds of other stuff going on depending on the night's theme. There are hair wraps, face-painting, refreshments and a non-stop barrage of sensory in- and output aimed not only at fun, but at returning KidTribers to Mom and Dad exhausted, happy and ready for bed.

McQuinn says she listens to all of the lyrics to all of the music she plays and doesn't include anything that's got any questionable material in it. Security at the events is tight, to prevent any unwelcome interlopers, and the cost (\$15 per child) is aimed at making it affordable for everyone. Currently, KidTribe takes place at the Santa Monica Place Mall every other Saturday night, although McQuinn is looking to expand in more areas in the L.A. area, as well as into other cities like San Diego, San Francisco and Portland, OR.

"I've got big ideas," she says with a smile. "You can't think small. I want a future president to have been a KidTriber!"

For more information on KidTribe, call 310.455.0580 or check out www.kidtribe.org.

Alex Miller is editor of Los Angeles Family.

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