

# FARM Blog

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## Cynthia King: Advocating for animals through the power and beauty of dance & the compassion of a cruelty-free ballet slipper.

Animal Rights, Artists, Interviews, Uncategorized, Veganism, activism

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Every day Cynthia King raises awareness about cruelty to animals and about the importance of living vegan. She is not an animal rights organization. She doesn't have an animal sanctuary or operate an animal protection group. No, her thing is dance. And she reminds us that a person need not work in an animal-related organization to make a remarkable difference for the animals.

As a well-known and respected dancer, instructor, and choreographer, and even a creator of [Cynthia King Vegan Ballet Slippers](#), the only readily available vegan ballet shoes, she has the ears (and toes) of many students. What she models for them and for her community, in her life and through her vegan studio, is compassion for all beings. Her activism blends beautifully into her life as she uses her creative gifts and talents as a powerful vehicle for sharing the vital message of compassion.



Cynthia King's dance students visit Woodstock Farm Animal Sanctuary.  
Copyright Photo by Amy Way

**"Knowing an animal suffered and died in order for me to dance, just didn't work for me. The shoes allow me to dance in good conscience." - Cynthia King**

From a recent performance piece exposing the exploitation of animals in the circus to a revelatory piece titled, "Dinner," part of the February 19th show, "Dinner" and Other Dances at Kumble Theater in NYC, Cynthia King is taking on serious issues with creativity, beauty, and courage.

Just talking with Cynthia on the phone was invigorating for me (Cindi Saadi). Her energy is contagious! One might think that running a successful studio, which includes designing costumes and sets, plus volunteer work and a family would leave her running on empty. Quite the contrary, Cynthia is energized by the amazing opportunities she has to be both creative and compassionate and to make a positive difference. Thank you, Cynthia, for sharing your energy and passion with us in this inspirational interview.

**FARM: Tell us about your journey to becoming vegan.**

**CYNTHIA:** I first made the connection when I was 10 years old and discovered what was really on my plate. I eventually read more about the ways animals are abused. It took a while to put together, but I eventually did. My family and I are vegan and although the common perception is that it is hard to be vegan, I don't think it is. Being vegan is about not torturing animals or causing them to suffer. The point is, there is no need to be cruel to animals and no reason for an animal to be tortured or used for food or anything else. For me, the health and environmental benefits are extras. It's about not being mean.



*Cynthia King's dance students visit with the animals at Woodstock Farm Animal Sanctuary. Photo by Roan Pastor*

**FARM:** *How are you incorporating animals and the message of compassion for animals into your dances?*

**CYNTHIA:** We do a lot of ballets and dances about animals. For years I have done pieces that celebrate the way animals move. For kids it's great, they can hop like a bunny, float like a butterfly, gallop like a horse, or slither like a snake. And when we talk about the way animals move, we talk about them in loving, kind ways. I work with kids so much and I find it offers a nice opportunity for teaching them about not being cruel.

Recently I have been doing more serious pieces with the kids. Last year we did an exposé about animals and entertainment. Children were in cages like the animals at the circus. "Circus go-ers" let them out to do a desperate dance. I talked with the young kids about cats and dogs since they know cats and dogs. Then I talked with them about circus animals. I reminded them of how hard it is to learn to dance - even though they want to and the animals in the circus don't want to be there.



*Rehearsal for Exposé. Photo by Amy Way*

We're very excited about our February show, "Dinner" and Other Dances. During the "Dinner" piece, dancers will play the animals on a plate and will get up and dance like the ghosts of their former selves - reminiscing about what it was like to be alive.

I feel like I am really living my message. It has all come together, but it has also taken time. The school needed to stand on its own first. Now my school is thriving and I have the support of the dance community. So it is time to really get more serious and daring.

**FARM:** *How did you come to create vegan ballet slippers?*



*Cynthia King's Vegan Ballet Slippers*

**CYNTHIA:** I am not a shoemaker and never really wanted to be one. But I needed vegan ballet slippers! Knowing an animal suffered and died in order for me to dance just didn't work for me. I also needed a shoe I could recommend in good conscience to my students. So I got materials and went to a dance shoemaker who was able to make a pair. Then I just needed to find a way to make a thousand of them. It was a challenge, but it wasn't insurmountable, especially after I had one pair made. I found my way as I went, picked people's brains, sent out samples, and the first shoes were ready in 2003 (a year after the studio opened). Then I kept tweaking the materials until I got one I really liked. Now we have split-sole ballet slippers, canvas on top and synthetic on the bottom, and they are the only ones made. It was hard getting the better material and the split-sole, which came out about a year ago, but now adult dancers are wearing them much more.

**FARM:** *What kind of reception are your vegan slippers getting?*

**CYNTHIA:** Well, it was very exciting recently to have Vogue contact us to get the shoes for Natalie Portman's photo shoot. Emily Deschanel also requested them for a scene in the TV show, *Bones*. And next they will be used in a Vogue UK photo shoot. Generally though, we sell them online, in catalogs, in certain stores, and there is now overseas interest in them. The shoes are worn exclusively by a few dance companies and there are a lot of belly dancers wearing them!

**FARM:** *What has been most important for you about creating vegan ballet shoes?*

**CYNTHIA:** They allow me to dance in good conscience and with more joy. Symbolically, I am not stepping on someone. Literally, I am not stepping on dead skin. No one had to suffer and die for me or my students to dance, and I am not supporting something evil. They are also great conversation starters for getting to a very important message.

**FARM: What it is like having a vegan studio?**

**CYNTHIA:** Wonderful, especially now that I have some people on my staff who are also vegan. My studio is completely vegan. No one can bring in anything that is not vegan and we help them find alternatives. I also have a lot of vegan literature in the studio, including some fairly graphic pieces. It was the graphic, more shocking info that helped me when I was younger. I think teenage years are a great time to reach kids about animals and they share a lot with each other online. For the younger kids, I often feel I am planting seeds and modeling compassion, even in little ways such as "relocating" a spider! Hopefully the message gets through.

Guest dancers and musicians will perform in our February show and they must also wear and use vegan clothing and equipment. For tappers, there are synthetic tap shoes. For drummers, there are synthetic heads. We also do not use any feathers.

We also do unique types of vegan events, such as a recent book reading/dance event with Maya Gottfried, author of *Our Farm*. This great event featured Maya reading from her book while I led the children in animal dances. There was music from another vegan performer, plus vegan treats for everyone. (See below for info about a special performance in the Feb. show featuring Maya & her book, *Our Farm*.)

It was also great taking eight carloads of dancers and some of their families to Woodstock Farm Animal Sanctuary for a giant photo shoot for the vegan ballet slippers. All the kids were there in their tutus, mingling with the animals.

**FARM: What do you think the animal rights movement needs more of?**

**CYNTHIA:** I think politicians need to be held more accountable and follow through with certain legislation. We need more people getting legislation written, supported, passed, and enacted. Changes can happen from within the system. It's hard work and perhaps not glamorous, but it's really important. We need to raise money to support certain candidates, rally as voters, and just get involved.

**FARM: What's on the agenda for Cynthia King's Studio and Vegan Ballet Slippers?**

**CYNTHIA:** I want to continue expanding the school and get the shoes into the mainstream market as much as possible. As I expand the school, I'd like to have more time to work on choreographing for the kids and adults.



Cynthia King

I encourage you to visit the [Cynthia King Dance Studio Web site](#), [Cynthia King Vegan Ballet Slippers](#), and follow them on [Facebook](#) and [Twitter \(@CynthiaKingCKDS\)](#). Or if you live in NY, check out the wide variety of classes available. See recent coverage of Cynthia's studio from the [NY Daily News](#) and [The NY Times](#), and don't forget to check out the February 19th show, "Dinner" and other Dances, held at [Kumble Theater](#) in Brooklyn, NY. The 7 p.m. show will also feature a special performance, "Sanctuary Suite," featuring Maya Gottfried who will read from her book of poetry, *Our Farm*, as the dancers perform an *Our Farm*-inspired dance, choreographed by Cynthia. A portion of the proceeds from the show will benefit Farm Sanctuary.

- Cindi Saadi for the FARM blog