

# FLAUNT

## THE WOODEN FLOOR

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Merce Cunningham, the late, great American avant-garde dancer and choreographer, once said that one realizes their identity through the act of dancing. What better way for youth to discover their potential than through the act of movement? This is one of the goals of The Wooden Floor, previously known as Saint Joseph Ballet, an after school organization in Santa Ana, California that serves 400 low-income youth annually. "The kids, in the process of doing all these explorations, investigations, or experimental work in the studio, come to connect with the parts of who they are that they don't have space to connect with in other parts of their lives," says Melanie Ríos Glaser, Executive and Artistic Director of The Wooden Floor.

But what makes this program even more special is that this is mainly done through contemporary dance. Yes, that kind of dance. The kind of dance reserved for the avant garde; the kind of dance that one normally finds accompanied with compositions by John Cage or Philip Glass; the kind of dance that the LA Contemporary Dance Company and Martha Graham Dance Company perform. And to prove the fact that these kids are not merely "playing at making art" but actually participating in the wider discourse of progressive art, The Wooden Floor is performing this weekend in Downtown LA at REDCAT, a venue known for its careful curatorship of adventuresome art. It's an impressive feat for kids who are usually more concerned with Myspace and texting.

So, it's appropriate that the brand-new work being premiered this weekend at REDCAT involves issues about identity and stereotypes. Glaser and Payal Kumar, the Director of Communications & Marketing, were gracious enough to welcome Flaunt to a rehearsal of the new piece. The new piece titled "True or False: I was Born in the Netherlands," a reference to one of the dancers and a challenge to the stereotype of the face of low income youth, is arresting, demanding, and just plain entertaining. That was to be expected; but what wasn't expected, was how moving it all was. Maybe it was the fact that the kids, even though they were performing in so-called "high" art, are still very much products of their environment. And through dance, they were not merely escaping that environment, but creating their own. Whatever it was, don't miss it, because, as Glaser puts it, dance is "transient, it's ephemeral, it exists only in space and time. . ."

The Wooden Floor is performing this weekend at REDCAT on Jan. 15 and 16. In addition to premiering new work by Melanie Ríos Glaser, the performance will feature choreography by Mark Haim and Nami Yamamoto.

