

THE ORANGE COUNTY REGISTER



The Wooden Floor, previously known as Saint Joseph Ballet, held four performances of its 28th Annual Concert last weekend and drew 2,500 concertgoers, nearly a sell-out at the Irvine Barclay Theatre. Those participating in a 230-guest backstage opening night underwriters' reception on June 2nd were, from left, board member Frank Foster, student Natasha Salgado, The Wooden Floor Executive and Artistic Director Melanie Rios Glaser, student Emilio Rodriguez, and board chair Damien Jordan. Concert underwriters, who collectively raised \$266,000, were thanked for their efforts, which assists the company in serving 365 low-income youth in its award-winning dance, academic and family services programs.

The Wooden Floor's Annual Concert Performances Nearly Sold-Out

By Donna Bunce
The Orange County Register
June 7, 2011

I have always been deeply moved at performances of The Wooden Floor, previously known as Saint Joseph Ballet. There is something so heartwarming about seeing young people find such joy in dance movement, in this case contemporary dance, that it practically takes your breath away. Then, to find that 100 percent of the company's graduates since 2005 have gone on to college, many of them the first in their family to do so, tells me this is not just a dance company. It is a place where low-income youth are empowered to build self-esteem, self-discipline and a sense of accomplishment through dance, academic and family programs. The Wooden Floor's tagline says it all: 'From here, you can step anywhere.'

The company's 28-year success is thanks to two amazing women: Founder, former Artistic Director and current board member **Beth Burns** and Executive & Artistic Director **Melanie Rios Glaser**. Burns' brilliant idea of engaging a guest choreographer for The Wooden Floor's Annual Concert in 1999 took the company in a new direction. Since then, other renowned collaborative artists have worked with the students to take the performances to a new level, and engaging dancers have worked with the students in repertory and master classes. As a result, The Wooden Floor is a nationally recognized model, with visitors coming to the company studios in Santa Ana with a wish to emulate the pioneering work of the company.

It has been quite a journey. And, if you listen to Glaser (the first choreographer Burns engaged in 1999), the journey is just beginning. "The board of directors and the team of us who work at The Wooden Floor know we are on the cusp of the next dream," she said at the 230-guest backstage

sponsors reception on June 2nd prior to the opening night of its Annual Concert at the Irvine Barclay Theatre. "We wish to make this arts-based youth development model accessible to more kids who line up for a spot at The Wooden Floor," she said. "And, imagine how much more good we could do if we could disseminate our model to others who wish to emulate our success, something we do now on a more informal basis."

Glaser paid tribute to **Mrs. Richard Steele**, "who has been a faithful patron and underwriter for many years," she said. In Steele's honor (she was unable to attend due to health reasons), Glaser stated that the opening night concert was dedicated to her.

The Wooden Floor's Board of Director's Chair **Damien Jordan** singled out and thanked the individual concert underwriters, who collectively raised \$266,000 in concert underwriting. They included Concert Chairs: **Joan and Don Beall**, the Helen Sperry Lea Foundation, **Ginnie and Rich Hunsaker**, he and his wife **Yvonne Jordan**, and **Socorro and Ernesto Vasquez**; Honorary Sponsor: **Nordstrom**; Associate Producers: **Jane and Jim Driscoll, Carleen and Chuck Haggerty, Dorothy and Don Kennedy, Marilyn McIntyre, Office Solutions**, and the **Schoellerman Foundation**; Concert Sponsors: **Beth Burns and Mark Gorman, Bobbi Cox, Hamilton-Selway Fine Art, Sharon and Terry Hartshorn, Haskell and White** (who hosted the reception), **Judy and Dennis Sweeney, Linda and Tod White**, the **William Gillespie Foundation**, and **Yellow House Fund**; Concert Partners: **Deborah and Larry Bridges, Sue and Peter Cooper, Mary Ellen and Jack Glaser, Lydia and Ken Himes, Ruth D. Wetherbee Foundation, Janice and Ted Smith**, and **Crevier BMW/Mini**.

As is tradition, two of The Wooden Floor's 375 dancers spoke at the reception. Twelve-year-old **Emilio Rodriguez**, who attends Orange County High School of the Arts, charmed everyone with his enthusiasm for being a part of The Wooden Floor's dance and academic programs, while **Natasha Salgado**, 14, admitted, "The Wooden Floor is my second home. The staff has led me to do so well in school and dance that after high school, my next big aspiration is to attend Harvard University." Planning to be an administrative lawyer, Salgado said she hopes to rise in government and maybe someday become a national leader. Her Dance Partners **Carleen and Chuck Haggerty** were beaming while she spoke. "She is amazing," Carleen told me later.

Board member **Frank Foster** invited guests to join the Dance Partners program, which pairs you with a student to provide encouragement and support. "Young people who have access to positive role models are much more likely to achieve personal and academic success," he said. Foster said the program is \$2,500 per student, which supports one child's participation in The Wooden Floor's dance, academic and family services programs for one year.

Moving on to the performance, the nearly sold-out audience saw 144 talented young artists perform contemporary works made in partnership with three top-of-their-field choreographers. **John Heginbotham**, a member of the Mark Morris Dance Group, choreographed "Pieces of Wood," accompanied by the Los Angeles Percussion Quartet, while award-winning choreographer **Susan Rethorst**, premiered "Too." Glaser reworked "True or False: I Was Born in the Netherlands," which premiered in 2010. The energetic, introspective, joyous performance received an instant standing ovation.

The four performances of "True" throughout the weekend drew 2,500 ticket holders, just shy of being sold-out. Pretty impressive!



Among those attending The Wooden Floor's backstage opening night reception were the company's Founder, former Artistic Director and current board member Beth Burns, left, and board member Cyrus Parker-Jeannette, who is Interim Associate Dean of the College of the Arts at Cal State Long Beach.



Joining the 230 invited guests at The Wooden Floor's backstage opening night underwriters reception of its 28th Annual Concert at the Irvine Barclay Theatre were, from left, Barbara and Bill Yingling and Socorro Vasquez. All three guests are members of the award-winning company's board of directors.



Among the 230 guests at The Wooden Floor's backstage opening night reception of its 28th Annual Concert at the Irvine Barclay Theatre were, from left, board member and underwriter Sharon Hartshorn, left, and Chuck and Carleen Haggerty, who were concert underwriters and are Dance Partners for 14-year-old Natasha Salgado, a student at The Wooden Floor, who spoke of her wonderful experience at the award-winning company.



Enjoying the backstage underwriters reception prior to The Wooden Floor's opening night performance of its 28th Annual Concert at the Irvine Barclay Theater were, from left, Richard and Ginnie Hunsacker and Ken and Lydia Himes, all of whom were concert underwriters.



Don and Joan Beall, pictured here, are longtime supporters of The Wooden Floor, previously known as Saint Joseph Ballet. They, along with many others, were honored at a backstage opening night underwriters reception at the company's 28th Annual Concert at the Irvine Barclay Theatre. Concert underwriters collectively raised \$266,000 for the award-winning company, which serves 375 low-income youth in its dance, academic and family services programs.