

The Wooden Floor's Annual Concert Promises to Dazzle



Choreographer Jeanine Durning, with students of The Wooden Floor

May 30, 2014
By Pamela Diamond

Swirling across the stage like grains of sand in the shallow surf of an incoming tide, the young dancers of The Wooden Floor exude an effervescent energy that is as palpable as it is uplifting.

It's the afternoon of Memorial Day, and I'm sitting in a darkened house at Irvine Barclay Theatre watching the tech rehearsal for Artistic Director and Co-CEO Melanie RíosGlaser's fresh re-purposing of her 2013 premiere "Billowing Bubbles/REMIX."

A playful, imaginative work with undercurrents of RíosGlaser's trademark thought-provoking expressiveness, it's one of four pieces (two reprisals and two newly commissioned world premieres by noted New York-based choreographers) that will be performed this weekend when the award-winning arts-based youth organization celebrates with its 31st annual concert "Front door, blue sky."

"It's such a transformative experience for them, and very empowering to be part of the creative process. With all the choreographers that are invited here, I intend that they come in with a real openness to get to know the youths they are working with and have their collaboration contribute to the development of the work," says RíosGlaser after the rehearsal finishes.

We sit down in the lobby to sip bottled water and talk about the concert, choreography, and the continuing impact that co-creating contemporary dance works has on the 375 low-income youth, aged nine to 18, who participate in The Wooden Floor's year-round dance education classes.

Nearly half of them are dancing in this year's concert, but all benefit from its after-school tutoring, college preparatory, and family service programs that have resulted in great academic success.

"That's really our meat and potatoes," she explains. "So it's not only about the art making, although that's certainly an important part. We have the philosophy of 'give children the best and they will rise to the best.' Rather than imitation, this is dance being staged on them. The dancers come into the studio ready to be open and focused on what they bring to the process."

The results can be enjoyed through Saturday, where in addition to "Billowing Bubbles/REMIX," The Wooden Floor will reprise John Heginbotham's six-minute frolic in the park called "Promenade," set to the music of George Gershwin, as well as the world premieres of Yanira Castro's "ODE," which pairs an exposed stage with minimalist movement vocabulary, and Jeanine Durning's "epic," where 37 of The Wooden Floor's most experienced dancers display their virtuosity backed by an original score performed live onstage by composer Alejandro Cohen.

The Wooden Floor presents "Front door, blue sky" May 29 – 31 at Irvine Barclay Theatre in Irvine. Performances are 8 p.m. nightly with a 2:30 p.m. matinee on Saturday, May 31. Tickets are \$20 for general seating and \$50 for benefit seating. For tickets and information, call (949) 854- 4646 or go to TheWoodenFloor.org.

