

## Center Stage: Wooden Floor Waxes Poetic with Dance Concert May 28 – 30



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by Pamela Diamond

Energy crackles the air like lightning across a desert sky as more than a dozen of The Wooden Floor's teenaged dancers circle one of its Santa Ana studios, warming up with a run. Overhead, the thundering of hundreds of other younger feet amps up everyone's excitement level. Something amazing is being created here.

It's late on a Monday afternoon and rehearsals are well underway for all three of the World Premiere works being performed next week in The Wooden Floor's 32<sup>nd</sup> annual concert, titled "As light comes through," at Irvine Barclay Theatre. Renowned for pushing the envelope of what art is and who gets to create it, The Wooden Floor consistently presents powerfully emotive, thought-provoking collaborative dance pieces by bringing together low-income youth ages 9 – 18 and nationally lauded contemporary choreographers.

That being said, with the debuts on May 28 of Artistic Director and Co-CEO Melanie Ríos Glaser's "Playground," Bessie Award-winner Faye Driscoll's "The Hundred in the One," and "Skylight," by hot New York choreographer and 2016 U.S. State Department Cultural Ambassador John Heginbotham, the word is out that this year the acclaimed arts organization may just have outdone itself.

"Use as much space as you possibly can," says Heginbotham as the dancers, fresh from their sprints, re-focus and launch into a run-through of the finale.

Set to music by Brazilian composer Heitor Villa-Lobos, to be performed live by alternating solo guitarists Juan Sixto and Christian Cruz, "Skylight" is atmospheric, evocative, and highly rhythmic.

As the rehearsal continues the piece evolves, patterns shape-shifting with the intricate interweaving of a serape. Heginbotham fine-tunes some movements, changes others, and offers corrections. Up for the challenge, his 34 teenage dancers follow with the polish of professionals, bringing their individuality into play with every step.

"They're so enthusiastic, so delightful to work with, and I love that they feel comfortable enough to offer suggestions (during the creative process)," he comments during a lively pre-rehearsal interview. As the piece progressed, Heginbotham says it revealed to him images of the Southwest, with the dancers becoming "at times the inhabitants, a mirage, and the naturescape itself."

A former member of the Mark Morris Dance Group whose choreographic commissions include Isaac Mizrahi's "Peter & the Wolf" for the Guggenheim Museum's 2013 Works & Process series, Heginbotham has gotten to know many of The Wooden Floor's young dancers during his three West Coast residencies with the arts organization. (Past pieces include 2011's "Pieces of Wood" and 2012's "Promenade," which was reprised for last year's concert, "Front Door, Blue Sky.")

"No matter what, there's always some collaboration," he points out, reflecting on the synergy that comes from being in an organic flow. "I'll want to have some special effect happen, for instance, where I want everyone to be in the air at the same moment like a mushroom cloud. So I'll tell them 'I don't care how you get there or what you do to get in the air,' and it doesn't have to be the same every time."

"It's a part of them having some additional ownership beyond their performance. Now that I actually know some of the kids, I have a better sense of what to expect and it's really beautiful to see how they grow. In its simplest form, every performer is special and will move through the choreography in their own way."

*The Wooden Floor presents "As light comes through" May 28 – 30 at Irvine Barclay Theatre. Performances are at 8 p.m. nightly, with a 2:30 p.m. matinee on Saturday, May 30. \$20 General seating; \$50 Benefit seating.*