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WOODEN FLOOR STUDENTS RISE TO THE OCCASION



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Award-winning choreographers **Faye Driscoll** and **John Heginbotham** recently joined Wooden Floor students and co-CEO and Artistic Director **Melanie Ríos Glaser** to premiere three new contemporary works during the organization's 32nd annual concert, "As light comes through."

Despite the young age of the performers, the choreographers kept their creative expectations high and presented a repertoire that challenged the dancers mentally and physically.

"We commission choreographers who are moving dance forward," Glaser said in a news update about the concert. "It is important that these artists already be enjoying an established and thriving professional career."

Directors at the Wooden Floor say they believe that if the choreographers are continually pushing the existing limits of art, the students will not only learn the content, but will observe firsthand what the creative process looks like.

"It is eye-opening to see a professional work," said **Gisselle Pineda**, 17. "We can get so stuck within boundaries, but working with new people gives us more ideas and broadens our possibilities."

Heginbotham, artistic director of Dance Heginbotham in New York, said that although he arrives with a concept, his ideas are shaped by the unique personalities in his rehearsal room.

"Just the other day, I was dancing off on my own, and John saw me and asked me to repeat what I was doing," said **Elizabeth Gonzalez**, 18. "Soon enough he inserted the movement I came up with into the piece."

Said **Roland Acosta**, 18: "There's a lot of feedback between the choreographer and the dancer. Even though he is a professional, I feel that we are free to communicate with John on a deeper and powerful level."

With the premiere of his piece "Skylight" at last week's show, Heginbotham tried to evoke an image and sense of being in a desert. The students danced to live guitar music composed by **Heitor Villa-Lobos** and conjured impressionistic images of sand and sun.

"These students are like sponges," Heginbotham said. "As soon as I told them to perform like they were in a desert, their rich imaginations took over and the dance looked just like the music sounded."

Along with dance instruction, the nonprofit Wooden Floor offers its low-income students academic and family services that help them prepare for the future. Most audition for the program in elementary school. This year, 100 percent of Wooden Floor seniors were accepted into college in the fall.

"Once you find this place, you don't want to leave," Gonzalez said. "I don't know where I would be without dance. It saved me."

"Dance is a transformative vehicle," said **Dawn Reese**, Wooden Floor executive director and co-CEO. "Sometimes these kids feel like they are in the shadows of their community, but when they feel what its like to be onstage with a literal spotlight on them, we see students reach their full potential."