MELANIE RIOS GLASER
ARTISTIC AND EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF THE WOODEN FLOOR

Melanie Rios Glaser handles her responsibilities with the grace of a dancer, which makes sense since she’s one of the best choreographers around. Glaser, whose love of dance stems from her native Guatemala, where she witnessed the healing power of dance amid war and civil unrest, spent years traveling the globe, creating routines in locations from North Africa to New York City. Now she shares her talents with her students in Orange County. But it takes more than world-class dance moves to succeed in her current position. The Wooden Floor is a nonprofit that functions as both a dance studio and after-school safe haven for at-risk youths. It offers many services like family counseling, academic tutoring, mentoring, and enrichment field trips. With her principal role in the organization, Glaser has a hand in everything, and her most important task is getting each student into college. It’s Glaser’s most challenging balancing act to date.

COAST FOLLOWED GLASER FOR A DAY, STUDYING THE ROUTINE OF A SUCCESSFUL DANCER AND NONPROFIT DIRECTOR.

9 A.M. Breakfast at Zov’s Bistro in Tustin with a Wooden Floor board member to talk about visions for the future. Since 2005, 100% of the graduating class has gone on to college, escaping a vicious cycle of poverty. The nonprofit is ready to share its model with the world. The duo discusses this broader goal while still focusing locally to help more kids in Santa Ana.

11 A.M. Glaser looks over an ad for The Wooden Floor’s May concert designed by a firm in Los Angeles. She is unsure about the logo so decides to go back to the drawing board.

12 P.M. Several important phone calls, first with Beth Burns, who founded The Wooden Floor 27 years ago, but recently retired. Glaser works on her tribute, a place in the building to honor her memory. Afterwards, Glaser calls potential donors because two more seniors are going to college and need scholarships.

2:30 P.M. A meeting to select art for the May performance. Renowned video artist Bill Viola has allowed The Wooden Floor to use his installations. The first option is a woman on the beach slowly walking towards the screen. The second, more ominous option is a fuzzy black-and-gray circle with faces eerily emerging from its center. Glaser looks at both before making her choice.

4:30 P.M. Dance class at last! At 3:30 p.m., kids trickle in from school and by 4 p.m., they are pounding on the studio doors, ready for class to begin. Glaser stretches and meditates alone on the floor for a few peaceful moments; when she finally lets them in, they run joyfully inside, barefoot and dressed in black dance attire. The class has about 50 students, ranging in age from eight to 18. They spend hours working on just one piece.

8:30 P.M. Class ends and an exhausted but fulfilled Glaser heads home to relax with her family. - SARAH ROSE ATTMAN

GET INSPIRED

SEE THEM IN ACTION // The Wooden Floor’s talented young dancers will perform excerpts from acclaimed late choreographer Merce Cunningham’s Roratorio on May 15 at 7:30 p.m. and May 16 at 2:30 p.m. at The Studio at Sage Hill, 20402 Newport Coast Dr. Go to the Web sites for tickets.
sagehillschool.org // thewoodenfloor.org