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Beverly Hills News – USC Glorlya Kaufman School Of Dance Premieres Dance Center



Glorlya Kaufman

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By Laura Coleman

It's hard to believe that until recently, the University of Southern California did not have a dance program.

In fact, it wasn't until Beverly Hills resident Glorlya Kaufman learned of the university's deficiency at a dinner in 2012 that a solution began to germinate. Three years later, in fall 2015, the prestigious Southern California university opened its first new school in almost four decades, the USC Glorlya Kaufman School of Dance (USC Kaufman).

"I love dance because it touches hearts and souls," described Kaufman, a remarkable philanthropist who reinvigorated dance at the L.A. Music Center in 2003 following a \$20 million donation.

Inspired by her belief that dance brings joy to the world, Kaufman is doing everything in her power to help engender a love of dance as well as foster the growth and engagement of those who choose to pursue the craft.

This October, in time to welcome its second class of carefully selected students, USC Kaufman will unveil its permanent home, the new USC Glorlya Kaufman International Dance Center.

Designed by Pfeiffer Partners Architects following myriad brainstorming sessions together with Kaufman, Dean Robert Cutietta and Vice Dean and Director Jodie Gates, a former prima ballerina with Joffrey Ballet, the 54,000 square foot physical representation of USC Kaufman will be home to the cutting-edge program starting Oct. 5.

"There's a lot of me in there," the eponymous patron remarked.

The hallmark of USC Kaufman, which offers a professional dance degree built around a diverse, flexible, globally-minded curriculum, is perhaps best expressed in its motto "The New Movement".

In addition to preparing students for the large umbrella of human movement where intersecting techniques, traditions and styles create new forms to be expressed in dance within the landscape of a technology-driven world, the curriculum also teaches students the business side of operations, critical in making sure graduates can get a job in the industry.

Now in its second year, Kaufman said the program had 400 students audition for its first class of 33 students; this year, 350 auditioned for 18 spaces.

"Because it's a conservatory, we want to really concentrate on the kids," she said. "When these kids get out, they'll have a place to go." Kaufman said.

Housed within an Italian Collegiate Gothic exterior, the 70-foot tall new building is the largest dance-dedicated complex on a private university campus, according to Jeffrey de Caen, associate dean of Operations.

State-of-the-art floors and subfloors, made of Harlequin sprung marley, cushion the dancers' movements and provide sure footing for the many styles of dance explored in the space. These floors are specially isolated so sound and vibrations from music and dancers' movements will not be heard from other nearby rooms; the studios are built so that their concrete floors do not touch the sidewalls or the slab foundation.

"We believe that a lifelong career in dance can begin here, and to that end we are creating a visionary school that will be at the forefront of developing dancers, choreographers and dance leaders for the future," Cutietta said.

Students will have endless tools to experiment with different settings and engage in dialogue with other performing arts disciplines both on and off campus. Thanks to a unique partnership with Glorlya Kaufman Presents Dance at The Music Center, each visiting dance company works with Kaufman students in master classes covering professional development and artistic performance.

Kaufman, who still recalls fondly how dance had the power to lift her beyond her shy childhood demeanor, said she is motivated to create dance opportunities in order to bring happiness to others.

"Dance really uplifted me," she said. "I think life is really hard...dance is a happy thing; you forget about problems."