

Your Studio Space: USC Glorya Kaufman School of Dance Opens the Ultimate Dream Dance Facility

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Located at the gateway to the University of Southern California's arts neighborhood, the USC Kaufman building facade and exterior have been designed in traditional Collegiate Gothic style. USC Kaufman partners with arts organizations and dance companies, such as The Music Center and Hubbard Street Dance Chicago, to present dance performances and workshops.

"I like to think of this building as state-of-the-art," says Jodie Gates, the inaugural director and vice dean of the University of Southern California Glorya Kaufman School of Dance. "There is a feeling of spaciousness and expansiveness that dancers need—to create, to think, to move, to reimagine."

At nearly 55,000 square feet, the Glorya Kaufman International Dance Center, scheduled for completion this month, is a formidable space, one that might be better described as "future-of-the-art." Designed by a team of architects led by William Murray, a principal at Los Angeles' Pfeiffer Partners Architects, the three-story structure, the school's new home, houses six studios with soaring cathedral ceilings. Los Angeles philanthropist Glorya Kaufman donated the funds for the project and got Gates' input—as well as the advice of choreographers like William Forsythe, who is on faculty at the school, and Ohad Naharin—on the layout, function and design of the building.



It all serves what Gates calls "the New Movement," the philosophy of a dance program that rethinks the principles of higher dance education. "The students in this program will be given a box of tools to take with them whether they become performers, choreographers, filmmakers or CEOs," says Gates. "The beauty in all of this is that we have the ability to design a curriculum speaking to the needs of today's dance artists. We're developing the hybrid dance artist."

BFA undergraduates may study heady subjects such as "Colloquium: History of Performance and Cultural Context" and "Dance Leadership: Dance Management and Entrepreneurship." (This year's inaugural freshman class has 33 dancers, but future classes will be more intimate—around 16 to 20 for each undergraduate year.) The program's emphasis on

multimedia and interdisciplinary collaboration lets students choose concentrations like choreography for stage and cinematic arts or dance and music. It also requires dancers to study hip hop. "For our dancers, learning the leadership skills to become highly trained hybrid artists and scholars in the field now means working fluidly across mediums and between dance styles," says Gates.



Architectural renderings of building and studios

Floors Create a Cushion of Quiet

A hybrid approach extends to the construction of the school's Harlequin dance floors. Four studios have marley surfaces to accommodate ballet and contemporary classes, and another two are equipped with wood surfaces for other dance styles. All of the floors are sprung with a basket-weave substrate for cushioning and sound insulation. "We wanted to make sure you can have tap in one room, hip hop in another, ballet in a

third, contemporary or jazz in a fourth, and not disturb one another," says Jeff de Caen, associate dean for operations at USC Kaufman and Thornton School of Music.

The secret to the soundproofing lies in the construction of the floors, which are floated, rather than attached to the foundation. They sit on neoprene pads and insulation that transmit the lateral load. "They can move in reaction to dancers or audio without shaking or disturbing the rest of the structure," says de Caen.

Moving Beyond Mirrors

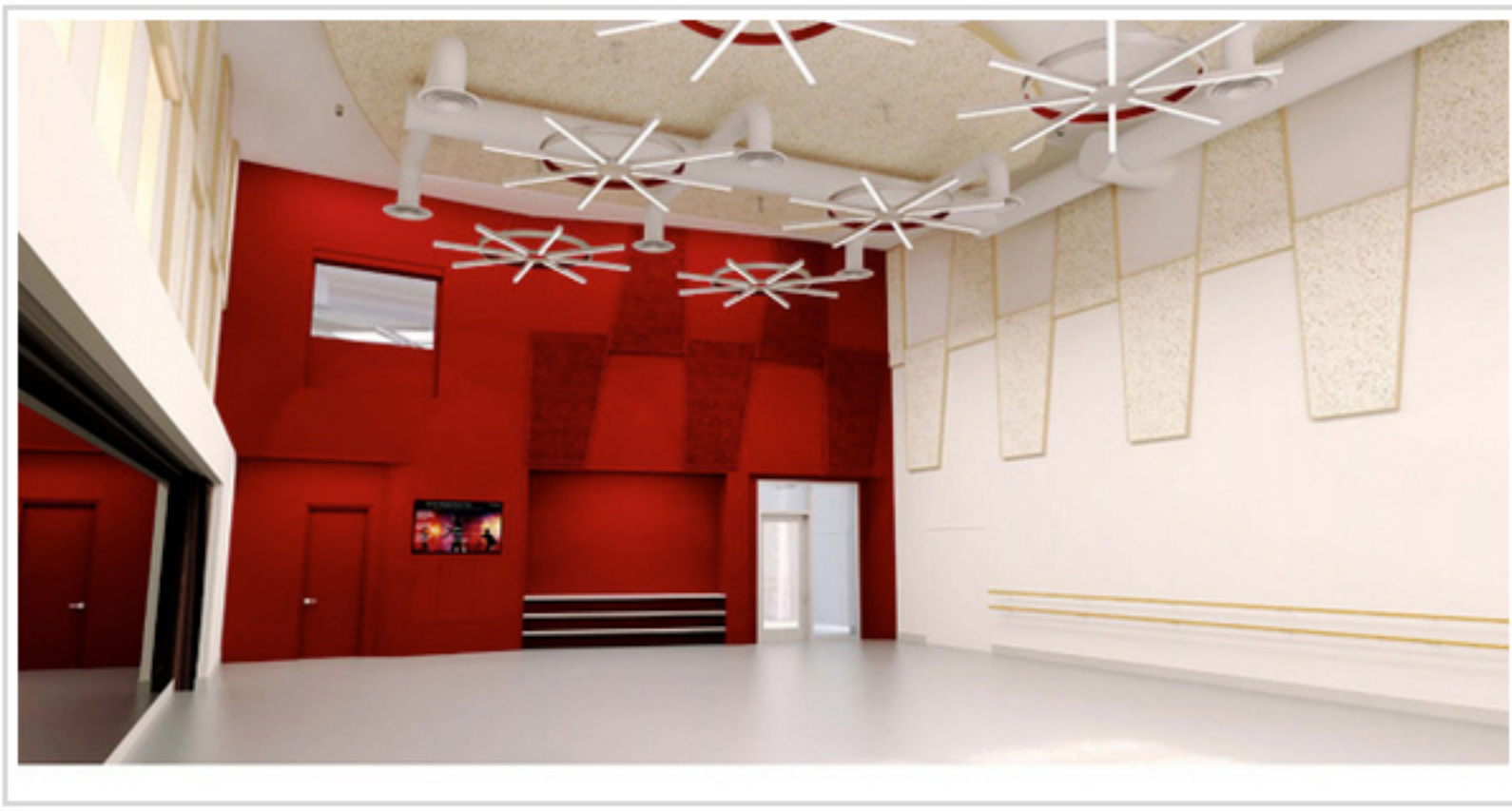
The largest studio, called the Performance Studio, measures 3,591 square feet and can serve as a multipurpose rehearsal space, a black-box theater or a full proscenium stage with 140 retractable seats, withdrawable wings and a motorized cyclorama. It has state-of-the-art projection, video, audio and lighting technology. It is also mirrorless, to allow artists to process movement internally rather than externally. Students will also perform on stages in other buildings and do site-specific work. The school's first floor also has four mirrored studios, ranging from 2,300 to 2,500 square feet. Arched windows flood the studios with light.



A 21st-Century Environment

Very few details have been overlooked in the design. The first-floor hallways have curved corners, to avoid 90-degree angularity and offer a more pleasing aesthetic. The hallways provide ledges at barre height so dancers can stretch between classes or rehearsals. The water fountains supply filtered-water refilling stations. All the studios have sophisticated audio-visual centers that

connect to the building's main network, so that, for example, a live-streamed cinema-cast from the Bolshoi Ballet can be viewed simultaneously in all the studios. The wall-mounted flat screens in the studios can be individually or centrally controlled, and all the studios are equipped with a sound system. The internet connections feature the fastest and broadest bandwidth available.



The center's mezzanine level includes men's and women's dressing rooms. There is also a theater control room with video-editing capabilities above the performance studio. And for visitors, a viewing balcony above two of the first-floor studios allows for eagle-eye perspective. Also on the mezzanine level: a small fitness and training zone with somatic equipment, although students can use the well-equipped fitness center at the new USC

Village across the street, which will house up to 3,000 square feet of shops and retail space.

On the second floor, students can work in the "small" studio (more than 2,000 square feet); four academic classrooms with capacities for 30 to 60 students each; a conference room and kitchenette; and a collaborative space that dance majors can use 24 hours a day, along with their fellow student musicians, video artists and students from across the university. Additionally, the second floor houses the faculty offices, dressing rooms and meeting rooms. All of these amenities further Gates' belief that "dance creation and innovation need time, support and space."



Groundbreaking in April 2014, with (from left) dean Robert Cutietta, Glorya Kaufman, USC president C.L. Max Nikias and Jodie Gates

"Theoretically and philosophically, the center is a nexus point for Los Angeles and dance on the West Coast," says de Caen. "Now you've got this brick-and-mortar flag in the sand that says 'This is how committed we are.'" **DT**

Former dancer Joseph Carman is a longtime contributor to Dance Teacher.