

# SHOW

SAINT JOSEPH BALLET  
USES DANCE TO TEACH  
LIFE LESSONS TO  
STUDENTS - THIS TIME  
WITH PROFESSIONAL  
CHOREGRAPHERS-4

## DANCE OF BELONGING





# Going one step beyond

**Arts • Saint Joseph Ballet enriches the lives of its students with visiting choreographers.**

By SARA WOLF  
Special to the Register

**W**hen artistic director Beth Burns asked Mark Haim to create a dance for the students at Saint Joseph Ballet, the New York-based choreographer knew he had to say yes.

"I had a feeling in my gut," he said by telephone from his East Village apartment last week, "that this was going to be something that was important to do. It was more than a commission; it was about contributing to the world I live in through the art I've chosen to work in."

"Beth's vision," Haim added, "is so human."

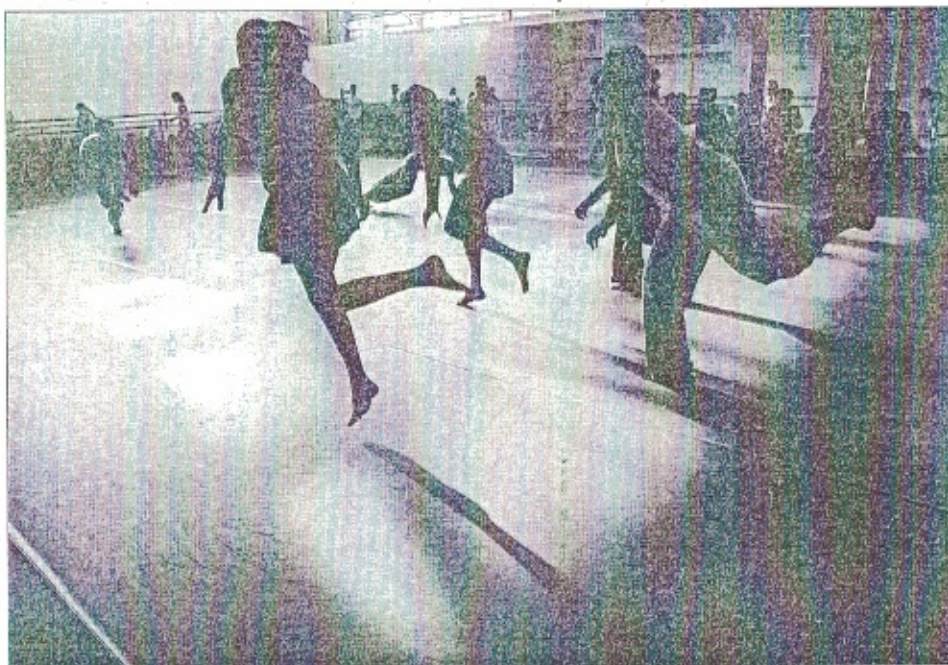
The founder of the Santa Ana after-school dance academy has a way of inspiring this kind of passion in the people she works with — the many staff members, parents, community volunteers and board members — and the at-risk youth the organization serves.

About 137 of these students will appear on the Irvine Barclay stage this week in the school's annual concert, which features Haim's new work, "Los Angelitos," as well as a premiere by Melanie Rios, a young Guatemalan choreographer.

Commissioning repertory is a relatively new venture for Burns, who had choreographed all the concerts until two years ago. During a recent interview, she said that the decision is one of Saint Joseph's long-range goals.

"We want to leave a legacy of truly fine dances and institute a tradition of choreographers creating serious, sophisticated pieces for and with our kids. The commissions make a statement about what inner-city youth can accomplish when resources are poured out for them."

That statement is also apparent in the \$4.2 million facility the organization christened in 1999. Next to the Bowers Museum in Santa Ana's Museum District, the



MEMBERS OF SAINT JOSEPH BALLET perform "The Music Came Last," choreographed by Melanie Rios. The dress rehearsal is in preparation for the ballet's 2002 Concert • Photos: Leonard Ortiz / The Register



BETH BURNS, left, and dance instructor Karen Woo watch and guide dancers through a dress rehearsal.

two-story sandblasted concrete block building is more than five times the size of its previous home. Twenty-one thousand square feet of space is dedicated to three spacious, light-filled dance studios, changing rooms, a costume shop and a study hall, plus ample room for the constellation of academic and family

support services Saint Joseph's offers its students.

The building was tailored to Saint Joseph's needs by the architectural firm of McLa-rand, Vasquez, Emsick & Partners — but only after a lengthy research process that entailed visiting and consulting with the National Ballet School of Canada and the San

## ONE IN MANY

Francisco Ballet School. "We wanted to do it right," Burns says, "and make a really beautiful space for the students. You express your values in everything you do, and we want to show that we value who we serve."

Current attendance in the year-round program hovers at around 400, an increase of more than 100 students since the organization moved. It is a number Burns hopes to stay at for now. The goal, she says, isn't to increase the number of youth they serve but the number of services they can offer those already enrolled in the program.

These include 43 weekly dance classes, family counseling, tutoring sessions, computer training, SAT test preparation, advice on college admissions and financial aid, and, for students who stay with Saint Joseph's for all four years of high school, the guarantee of a college scholarship.

Burns already notices a sig-

## 'Light, within'

- **What:** Saint Joseph Ballet 2002 Concert
- **When:** 8 p.m. Wednesday-Friday, 2:30 and 8 p.m. Saturday, 2:30 p.m. Sunday
- **Where:** Irvine Barclay Theatre, 4242 Campus Drive, Irvine
- **Cost:** \$35, benefit: \$15, general
- **Tickets:** (949) 854-4646 or ticketmaster (714) 740-7878

nificant difference in the level of student retention. What Rios noticed when she returned was a difference in skill level from when she choreographed for the students in 2000.

In fact Rios was so confident that she walked into the studio without a plan.

"It's one of the things I love about dance," she says. "The dancers come to the studio with nothing other than their bodies and tight's and leotards, and things just start happening from and in that open space. Together, we make something."

Like Rios, Haim uses im-

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