

Santa Barbara Festival Ballet

Happy 35th Anniversary!

By ERIN J. SMITH / CASA

FOR MANY, THE HOLIDAY SEASON JUST ISN'T COMPLETE WITHOUT A VISIT TO *THE NUTCRACKER'S KINGDOM OF SWEETS*. For over

three decades, the Santa Barbara Festival Ballet has brought the magical story of Clara and her Nutcracker Prince to life. To mark the anniversary of the long-standing tradition, dancers from *Nutcracker's* past gathered to honor the vision of former Santa Barbara Symphony conductor Ronald Ondrejka, the passion of founding Artistic Directors Robert and Carol Hanlin, and the generosity of Margaret C. Mosher during a gala thrown in their honor.

"The event was a wonderful opportunity to bring everyone together and honor the legacy," said Denise Rinaldi,

Santa Barbara Festival Ballet's Artistic Director. "Everyone was saying they needed more time to catch up. They are already talking about when they can come together again."

The 35-year tradition began when Ronald Ondrejka approached the Goleta Civic Ballet, under the direction of Robert and Carol Hanlin, with a vision to bring Tchaikovsky's beautiful score to life through music and dance.

"My husband's first reaction was that it was way too big an undertaking with our limited resources, knowing full well what a production of this size would entail,"

wrote Carol Hanlin in the program notes. But key funding from the Santa Barbara Foundation and The Mosher Foundation helped get the production going with

money for sets and costumes. Seventeen members of the Mosher family were present at the gala.

"We hoped to establish something children of Santa Barbara can grow up with, on both sides of the footlights," wrote Hanlin. The Santa Barbara Festival Ballet has danced *The Nutcracker* to a live symphony orchestra ever since, inspiring young musicians and dancers alike.

"*The Nutcracker* is not just a holiday production. It's been an artistic gift to the Santa Barbara community for 35 years," said Cindy Elster, Board President. "My favorite part is seeing all the children in the audience dressed up in their patent leather shoes. I encourage their families to take them up to the orchestra pit and see the instruments. Their eyes just pop when the instruments come to life. The whole experience is a cultural gift that lasts a lifetime."

Alumni from as far away as New York flew in for the gala event, including two-time Tony Award winning actress Cady Huffman, who played Fritz in the first production. Other alumni have stayed a bit closer to home, including Diana Replogle-Purinton, who has performed in nearly



Nancy Miller and Diana Replogle-Purinton with a young audience member

every production and is now recognized for her role as Frau Silberhaus. Desmond

O'Neill has appeared in 28 consecutive performances and continues to mesmerize audiences as Herr Drosselmeyer. Rinaldi, also an alumna, began her dance career as a student of the Hanlins and took on her role as Artistic Director 18 years ago.

"It meant a lot to me that I had this opportunity as a young dancer. I want other serious young dancers

to have a performing experience of this caliber," said Rinaldi. "The Hanlins have given us a wonderful legacy. I'm looking

to the next generation to carry it on. We celebrated a beginning, but there is no end."

Santa Barbara Festival Ballet is in residence at the Santa Barbara Ballet Center. For more information, call 966-0711 or visit www.santabarbaraballetcenter.com.



Bob Hanlin, Teresa Kusky Nowak, and Carol Hanlin



Julie Cattoi and Julie Salinas, Gala Co-Chairs



Back: Ronald Ondrejka, retired Santa Barbara Symphony Conductor, Elise Unruh, conductor, and Bob Hanlin, Founding Artistic Director; Front: Sylvia Lumberg, daughter of Margaret Mosher, Carol Hanlin, Founding Artistic Director, and Cindy Elster, Board President



Diana Replogle-Purinton, Desmond O'Neil, Teresa Kusky Nowak, Cady Huffman, and Kira Replogle-Purinton

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