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## FESTIVAL BALLET THEATRE Reaches Out to the Community in the Holiday Spirit

FOUNTAIN VALLEY, Calif. – Festival Ballet Theatre’s outreach programs, which reach around 20,000 children and adults per year, are starting the holiday season by bringing special performances of *The Nutcracker* to the local community. Through their outreach efforts this season, FBT will use *The Nutcracker* to expand the appreciation of dance and develop a new generation of audience members in Orange County.

*The Nutcracker* is one of FBT’s most popular productions, and they find that it is also one of the best performances to introduce children to ballet. Salwa Rizkalla, FBT’s artistic director says, “Art is a very important part of children’s lives, and ballet is the perfect medium to reach young children because it connects physical fitness, music, coordination, imagination and acting. *The Nutcracker* captivates children because of the wide variety in characters and settings. It starts with the warm atmosphere of the house party and moves into a fantasy world filled with different cultures, like Russia, Spain and Asia, as well as flavors including chocolate, cinnamon and peppermint. When children are exposed to art in a way that they understand, like with *The Nutcracker*, we are able to provide them with a positive experience, building their artistic understanding and appreciation at a young age.”

As part of FBT’s **Ballet To Schools** program, in coordination with the Arts Teach program at the Orange County Performing Arts Center, FBT will perform an abridged version of *The Nutcracker* at four local Orange County elementary schools. Members of FBT’s professional company, and dancers from FBT’s official school, Southland Ballet Academy, will perform two assemblies for **Woodbury, Meadow Park** and **University Park** schools in Irvine and **Newport Heights** in Newport Beach. The assemblies at Newport Heights have been made possible by a grant from the **Newport Beach Arts Commission**.

Rizkalla is especially excited to be visiting three different Irvine schools because Southland Ballet Academy will soon be opening a new location in Irvine, where they hope to better connect with the local audience and allow more young people to exercise their bodies and minds through becoming involved in ballet.

**Children’s Invitation to the Ballet**, another outreach program of FBT, invites Orange County schools and children’s groups to experience the excitement of a live ballet production

in the prestigious setting of the **Irvine Barclay Theatre**. These narrated performances, priced at just \$8 per ticket, enable children to experience the opulent sets and costumes of *The Nutcracker* in a professional atmosphere.

FBT has also designed a special condensed production, **Nutcracker for Kids**, which will be presented with the **Pacific Symphony Orchestra** at Renée and Henry Segerstrom Concert Hall. These two performances, which have already sold out, bring children to the theatre and introduce them to both ballet and orchestra through Tchaikovsky's music and FBT's choreography.

Members of FBT's company will also be performing at the Fountain Valley Tree Lighting on December 5<sup>th</sup>, adding to the festive holiday atmosphere of the event in their home town.

Throughout the year, and in conjunction with their other productions, FBT strives to offer artistically underserved children in the area with the opportunity to learn about dance through a variety of venues and different types of performances.

FBT will be performing the full-length holiday classic at The Irvine Barclay Theatre from December 11-24. While some performances have already sold out, FBT strives to make all of their productions family-friendly and affordable, with prices starting at \$33. For more information about *The Nutcracker*, or any of FBT's outreach programs, please visit [www.festivalballet.org](http://www.festivalballet.org).

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**Company History** Under the direction of Salwa Rizkalla, since it was founded in 1988, Festival Ballet Theatre has become one of Southern California's most vibrant and accomplished regional ballet companies. Celebrating its 20th anniversary of artistic service to Orange County, FBT is dedicated to presenting works that epitomize the artistry of professional ballet, offering cultural awareness of dance through educational programs, and nurturing a creative environment for some of our county's most talented dancers. Boasting a roster of impressive talent, the company's productions also feature internationally acclaimed guest artists from American Ballet Theatre, Boston Ballet, Joffrey Ballet, the Kirov Ballet, New York City Ballet, Pacific Northwest Ballet, San Francisco Ballet and Scottish Ballet. Festival Ballet Theatre strives to enrich the experience of Orange County's dance audience by highlighting the work of world-renowned guest and resident choreographers who have received critical acclaim for original ballets around the globe. With reverence for masterpieces of the past and a clear focus on developing future tour de forces, FBT presents a varied repertoire of full-length classical ballets including *Coppélia*, *Don Quixote*, *Giselle*, *The Sleeping Beauty* and *Swan Lake*; as well as contemporary works by some of the nation's most sought-after choreographers. FBT was also the bid winner of Ballet Pacifica's Assets

Auction, purchasing the dissolved company's name, sets, costumes and photography archive in order to preserve Ballet Pacifica's rich dance legacy for our community. Aspiring to the heights of artistic excellence, Festival Ballet Theatre simultaneously attracts the best in professional dance to its home-base while sending its own dancers out as artistic ambassadors to the nation. FBT's significant work has been recognized with a 2001 Arts Orange County Award for *Outstanding Arts Organization of the Year*.

**Salwa Rizkalla**, Artistic Director

Salwa Rizkalla's artistic vision and community involvement led to the creation of Festival Ballet Theatre, and its precursor Southland Ballet Academy. Her credentials as a classical ballet dancer include an impressive list of leading roles in well-known classical ballets, as well as appearances in original contemporary pieces. During her distinguished career as a professional dancer, Rizkalla had the privilege of working under the direction of world-renowned choreographers Leonid Lavrovsky and Serge Lifar. Trained in the Russian Vaganova method and having studied with ballet masters of the Bolshoi and the Kirov, Rizkalla holds a Bachelor of Arts degree in Ballet Pedagogy. In addition to her responsibilities as the artistic director of Festival Ballet Theatre and her busy teaching schedule at Southland Ballet Academy, Rizkalla was a faculty member of several area institutions, including Goldenwest College and the Huntington Beach Academy for the Performing Arts. A fully credentialed California teacher, she has been a dedicated educator, a tireless promoter of the arts, and an active participant in the cultural life of her community for more than 25 years. Her contributions have been recognized by The Orange County Music and Arts Administrators and Orange County Performing Arts Center with an *Orange County Arts Educator of the Year Award* for Secondary Dance (2003). Youth America Grand Prix has awarded Rizkalla *Outstanding Teacher* accolades several years running, including 2009.