

The official school of Festival Ballet Theatre opens a new studio in Irvine

IRVINE, Calif. - **Southland Ballet Academy** (SBA) the official school of Festival Ballet Theatre, has recently opened a new studio at 710 Roosevelt in Irvine. SBA was founded in 1983 in Fountain Valley, where it has served the Orange County community for over twenty seven years by cultivating the education and appreciation of classical ballet for students at all levels. The school, which perpetuates the Russian Vaganova method of classical ballet combined with the American style, is dedicated to excellence in training for the aspiring professional dancer. As such, many of its students have gone on to dance with professional companies, and win numerous awards and top honors at dance competitions across the world.

Last year, **Salwa Rizkalla**, director of SBA and artistic director of FBT, realized that there was a need for high quality dance instruction in a healthy, caring environment which could not be fulfilled solely within their Fountain Valley studios. She decided to open a new location in Irvine, which, due to SBA's reputation as the premier ballet school in Orange County, has been able to successfully reach a new group of children throughout South County.

The school is offering classes six days a week to all age levels, starting at just two and a half. Rizkalla, who has consistently been named "**Best Teacher**" by **Youth America Grand Prix**, has created a staff for her Irvine location that uses both current teachers from Fountain Valley, and some dedicated just to the Irvine location. Three of the instructors at Irvine were students of Rizkalla's as children, and have maintained such a great love and appreciation for dance, that they continue to teach today.

One of those instructors is **Elizabeth Chasteler**, FBT company member, who went to UC Irvine with a full dance scholarship and graduated with a degree in dance. She has been a teacher with SBA for over eight years, and is now teaching children ages three to seven at SBA's Irvine studio. Chasteler says "One of the great things about ballet is that students can start at a very young age and still have a great understanding and appreciation for the art form." Having started dancing at SBA when she was six years old, she understands how young people can grow through ballet, and the opportunities it can create for them.

The new location in Irvine is also offering adult classes that enable those who danced when they were younger to return to ballet in a relaxed and fun environment. Registration for all classes is rolling, and new students are welcome to take a free introductory lesson.

For more information, or to see a schedule for the Irvine location, visit www.southlandballet.com.

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Company History Under the direction of Salwa Rizkalla, since its founding 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 has also purchased the assets of Ballet Pacifica, preserving the company's rich dance legacy while enriching the future of FBT. 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

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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.