

The Portland Ballet holds gala studio reopening in Hillsdale

By Lee Braymen-Cleary
The Southwest Portland Post

Three hundred well-wishing ballet fans, parents and contributing philanthropists streamed through doors of The Portland Ballet for a gala grand reopening on Jan. 25. And what a gala!

Robert Hoffman, principal pianist, regaled the crowd with classical works and his own compositions. Attendees dined on a wide array of appetizers.

Ballet students costumed to the nines performed delightful renditions of favorites such as a “Sleeping Beauty” *pas de deux* not once, but twice.

Why the hoopla? After months of expensive remodeling costing somewhere between \$500,000 and \$700,000, The Portland Ballet Academy (located at 6250 SW Capitol Hwy in Hillsdale) celebrated a new opportunity to serve more ballet students, many more.

First opened in 2001 by artistic director Nancy Davis and managing director Jim Lane, The Portland Ballet was successful from the outset.

That Davis and Lane were once principal dancers for the original Los Angeles Ballet contributed to that success. They brought outstanding professional knowledge to school operations, a sensitive understanding of teaching, and a serious multi-level curriculum.

The Portland Ballet curriculum has successfully inspired and trained 150 or so young academy dancers, male and female alike. Starting with “creative ballet” for ages three through six, it builds layer by layer, seven layers in all, for students ages six to 22.

Now, with space stretched from

3,500 to 6,100 square feet, the academy can serve at least 50 more curriculum students and as many additional drop-in students.

Davis, excited about The Portland Ballet’s increased capacity, is thrilled about the remodel. “The expansion is something we’ve wanted for several years now, so this is a dream come true.”

According to Davis, “It gives us more options for expanding our programs, but it also gives us a sense of prestige. We can now provide an even higher level of excellence for our dancers and our community.”

Excellence is The Portland Ballet’s pride. When serious, motivated students finish the program, they are well prepared to compete at auditions with dancers nationwide.

“Our dancers go on to dance with professional companies and university programs,” said Davis.

According to Davis, graduates have danced with the Houston Ballet, the St. Louis Ballet, Ballet Memphis, Ballet West, the Sacramento Ballet, the Eugene Ballet and Ballet Idaho.

Still others have been invited to the professional division of companies including Alvin Ailey, the Pittsburgh Ballet Theatre, the San Francisco Ballet, the American Ballet Theatre and the School of American Ballet.

Devin Packard, 18, who danced the role of the prince in “Sleeping Beauty” at the gala, soon graduates from high school and the academy. Tall, slender but muscular, handsome and well mannered, he began serious dancing as a freshman and holds a lot of promise.

One of perhaps a dozen male dance students, he has already secured a position for summer 2014 with The



(Photos courtesy of Caitlin Dwyer, The Portland Ballet)

Boston Ballet.

For a long-term opportunity, he soon flies to San Francisco to audition and, if necessary, will continue competing elsewhere until he finds his true dance home.

During his dance education, Packard had many opportunities to perform publicly, for the academy offers shows annual shows.

During the 2013- 2014 season, The Portland Ballet offers three public performances. The first performance, a holiday performance, was held over the Thanksgiving weekend at Portland State University’s Lincoln Hall. Dancers were accompanied by the Portland State Symphony.

The second performance, date to be announced, at The Portland Ballet studios, is entitled “The Portland Ballet Showcase.” Students enrolled in each dance level will demonstrate skills they have mastered over the year.

The third performance, a June 13-15 spring concert, occurs again at the studios. It will feature quite skilled youth company members dancing to works created by well-respected choreographers.

Whether you want to enroll in classes or purchase show tickets, call The Portland Ballet at 503-452-8448, and check their website at www.ThePortlandBallet.org.

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