

:: ART+CULTURE

Ballet booster

Ventura County dance company hosts a flamenco fundraiser



Hana Goldstone (left) and Samantha Schilke (right), two members of the Ventura County Ballet Company.

by Paul Sisolak

First, there is the *cante*. Then comes the *balle*, followed by *toque*.

United, they characterize flamenco, a trio of elements that will find its way to Oxnard on Aug. 24 as part of a special fundraiser for the Ventura County Ballet Company.

Like the dancers in motion to the exotic sounds of the Spanish art form, the Sunday performance by the FlamencOlé Dance Ensemble is poised with the hopes of bolstering donations — and awareness — toward the Ventura County Ballet Company, of which the fledgling troupe has been a member since April under the tutelage of a respected local teacher.

"We're just basically asking everyone to participate and show their support," said Antoinette Lopez, director of the ensemble.

According to Lopez, the inaugural gala will feature appearances from Fabian Alonso, formerly with the National Ballet of Spain, and guitarist Ben Shearer and a rumba from seven ballet company dancers.

Additionally, Russian dancer Sergei Domrachev, the Rivera-Sunnarborg guitar-violin duo and celebrity guest Stephanie Zimbalist will appear.

The impressive performance roster was organized and choreographed by Lopez herself, already familiar to Santa Barbarans as the director of Antoinette's Rhythm and Dance Academy in that city's downtown.

FlamencOlé, the nonprofit arm of Lopez's school, closely mirrors the structure of the ballet company in Ventura. In 1992, Kathleen Noblin, another dance teacher of noted prestige, began the Ballet Academy Ventura, an outgrowth of the Chan-

nel Islands Ballet Company founded in 1979 by Mara Lysova.

The school's curriculum is based on the Vaganova method, named for legendary Russian ballet dancer Agrippina Vaganova.

Ten years ago, Noblin's academy established its own not-for-profit extension in the form of the ballet company. According to Noblin, the academy and company have a combined base of 250 students. It accounts for a solid performance repertoire, and this academic year alone, three major performances are scheduled: a classic in the form of *The Nutcracker*; a collaboration with the New West Symphony; and production of Beethoven's *Creatures of Prometheus*.

On top of that, the FlamencOlé ensemble event is largely intended to aid the arts community in Ventura County, defined by a lack of public funding and expensive stage productions.

"Getting adequate funds is always a problem. We require things like this gala so we can continue our work," Noblin said. "This year has been a big struggle for us, mainly because we've pushed ourselves to a whole different level. We still need community financial support."

Noting this, the gala is inaugural — intended as the first in a series of annual benefits for the school — during a time when formal dance training is quickly gaining in popularity and prevalence. Lopez noted the variety of dance options in Downtown and Midtown Ventura, with the likes of ballet, Spanish and Irish dance.

"I think it's wonderful. The community of Ventura is blooming," she said. "You go down Main Street, you look to your right and to your left and you see the diverse art

forms in the community."

"Dance has become a much more popular thing for a child to do," Noblin said. "More and more girls are starting young," moving on to professional careers in the arts.

Flamenco is finding its place in the arts community as well, a reflection of Southern California's Spanish history and influence.

"We feel it's part of our cultural heritage here and it should be represented," Noblin said. "We know flamenco is just a fun thing for people to see."

The fundraiser is also set to conclude with an awards ceremony acknowledging supporters of the local arts community.

According to Noblin, two Partner in Dance Awards for patrons of the arts will go to Sandra and Jordan Laby and Micheline and Albert Sakharoff. Kevin Parks, a graphic artist responsible for creating many of the ballet company's posters, stationery and literature, will receive a service award.

The evening's top honor, the Aficionado Award, is reserved for Neal Andrews, a Ventura City Council member.

"Neal has been an advocate for the company for years," Noblin said.

Said Andrews of his nomination: "I think they're doing a really great job of maintaining a quality ballet company. It's a major contribution to our cultural milieu."

Because this is the first planned fundraiser for the troupe, Noblin is uncertain how much the company will be able to collect financially, but said she would be grateful for any amount. ♦

For more information or to order tickets, call 653-2900.