

# THE ORANGE COUNTY REGISTER

## Local choreography project celebrates 10 years with a look back

By [PAUL HODGINS](#)

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What better way to celebrate a big anniversary than a trip down memory lane?

When Molly Lynch started thinking about how to celebrate the 10th year of her annual summer choreography event, the National Choreographers Initiative, she fixed on the idea of a "greatest hits" evening. It takes place on Saturday at the Irvine Barclay Theatre. "Discovery," the regular NCI showcase of new work, will be held on July 27.

"I wanted to focus on some of the successes of the past decade," said Lynch, the former artistic director of Ballet Pacifica and a member of the dance faculty at the University of California, Irvine.

And how to determine what was successful? Lynch had one simple criterion.

"We decided to do nine excerpts from choreographies that have gone on to be performed by other companies in the U.S. and abroad," Lynch said. About 22 of the 37 works created at NCI since 2004 fall into that category. She admitted it was a challenge to winnow down her choices.

"I wanted to find things from each of those years. I also wanted (the concert) to represent the different choreographers and directions and styles that we have seen."

Customarily, the annual choreographers program is only a single night of new works. Expanding to a second evening meant finding extra resources.

"I hired the dancers for an additional fourth week and invited the choreographers to come back and stage the excerpts from their pieces. Many of them were able to come," Lynch said. "The ones that couldn't sent someone else to stage it." The excerpts range in length from two to nine minutes.

The inspiration for a summer choreographers intensive resulting in performances came about when Lynch left Ballet Pacifica in 2003 after a dispute with its board of directors (the company folded in 2007).

"Some community members really enjoyed the work I had been doing with the company and wanted to know if we could continue it as an independent organization. I worked with (Irvine Barclay Theatre president) Doug Rankin and the dance department at UC Irvine to create a partnership and an advisory committee. There were about 10 people from the community who wanted to support the project."

The Barclay provides the performance venue; UCI's dance department offers rehearsal space. Lynch and her supporters raise about \$100,000 every year to pay for the dancers' and choreographers' costs.

"We're spending an extra \$40,000 because of the second event," Lynch said. "We got a \$20,000 matching grant that really pushed us forward."

This year, about 50 choreographers applied for four slots in the program of new works. "I look (at their work) to see if they have something interesting to say," Lynch said. "And I like the four choreographers to have at least somewhat different styles." A process of requests and negotiations among choreographers results in the dancers being divvied among the four. Two choreographers rehearse with their dancers in the morning and two in the afternoon.

Lynch has been shepherding choreographers through their creative journeys long enough to have noticed some patterns and changes in her world.

"You always see influences from (a choreographer's) background in their work – people they've trained or danced with or work that they've done.

"I'd say the biggest change I've noticed is that there's now a sense of wanting to tell more of a story. There was a period of abstraction that is, I think, fading a bit. (Choreographers) want to create a story – not necessarily a literal one but one that is open to some interpretation."

NCI has become a coveted prize for choreographers. Lynch thinks it's partly because of the freedom the opportunity offers.

"Choreographers are completely free to create a work of their own choosing. It's not a commission where they have to use a company that's given to them or other restrictions. They can use music they're inspired by, make movements that excite them."

The results can be satisfying, even though they might not be seen immediately, Lynch said.

"Some choreographers take what they've done here and turn it into two or three different pieces. A lot of good work seems to come out of this short intensive period."

#### **Here are the works excerpted at the NCI Highlights concert:**

"The Guy in the White Shirt" by Ann Marie DeAngelo (2004) Marymont Manhattan College

"Carolina Jamboree" by Lynne Taylor-Corbett (2004) Carolina Ballet

"Violin" by Val Caniparoli (2005) Richmond Ballet

"Vicissitude" by Edwaard Liang (2007) Morphoses Ballet

"Sentir em nos" by Frank Chavez (2007) River North Dance Chicago

"French Twist" by Ma Cong (2008) Smuin Ballet

"Luminous" by Peter Quanz (2010) Hong Kong Ballet

"Cold Winter's Waiting" by Brian Enos (2011) Grand Rapids Ballet

"Moments" by Darrell Grand Moultrie (2012) Barak Ballet

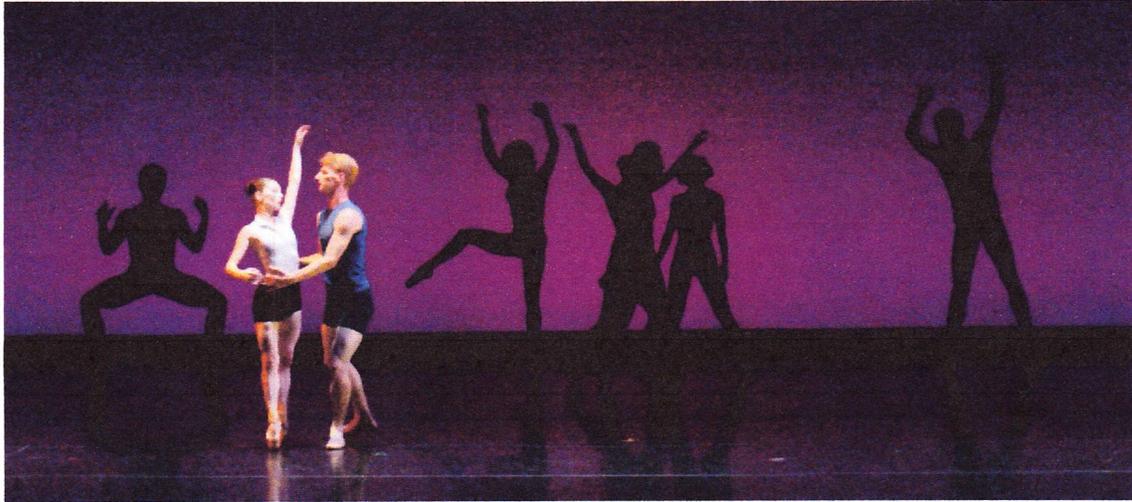
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Dancers perform James Sewell's "Modular" during the National Choreographers Initiative at the Irvine Barclay Theatre in 2004, the first year of NCI.

*MIKE SCHWARTZ, ORANGE COUNTY REGISTER*

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Artistic Director Molly must keep a sharp eye on the dancers. She has invited a group of 15 professional dancers from all over the country as well as 4 choreographers in a project called National Choreographers Initiative, or NCI.

*CHAS METEVIER, COUNTY REGISTER*

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