

Kate Honea

Dancer
Extraordinaire
with
The Sarasota
Ballet

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itnessing the agility, physicality, and grace of ballet dancers and the elaborate costuming and set designs is a feast for the eye. But the most anticipated are the principal dancers—the elite lead characters who bring to life the choreographer’s vision with excitement and precision. Kate Honea is one of the six female principal dancers and the Assistant Ballet Mistress of the nationally and internationally renowned The Sarasota Ballet where she became a soloist in 2007, a principal dancer in 2009, and Assistant Ballet Mistress in 2018.

Kate began ballet classes with her sister Emily in Miami as a five-year old. Kate recalls, “It all changed for me when my mother took me to the Miami City Ballet performance of the Nutcracker when I was seven years old. That was it. I have to do this. A year later I was cast as an angel and Emily was cast as a soldier. The next year I was cast as Marie. With the taste of a lead role, I knew I had to get serious about ballet.”

Kate attended the summer programs at the Central Pennsylvania Youth Ballet and the American Ballet and the American Ballet Theater. She became involved with the Florida West Youth Ballet at the encouragement of Robert de Warren. In 1994, her parents purchased the Longboat Observer and she began classes with The Sarasota Ballet and became an (unpaid) apprentice first in 1997 (while attending Booker High School in the mornings).

During her senior year in high school, she danced with the Pittsburgh Ballet including 30 performances of the Nutcracker and spent two more years in the graduate program. She rejoined The Sarasota Ballet apprenticeship in 2002 with Robert de Warren’s support and encouragement.

Joseph Volpe, Executive Director of The Sarasota Ballet, says, “Kate Honea is a reflection of the best of The Sarasota Ballet—talent, dedication, commitment, and grit. She has been central to many wonderful performances of the best repertoire. She is a key person in the Company and a role model to newer Company members. Kate has always strived to help others in the community. She was the co-chair of the Neuro Challenge Foundation fundraiser dinner. She is very involved in our new program to work with people with Parkinson’s disease. She is the co-chair of our Annual Gala on January 5, 2020. Kate is a gem in Sarasota.”

The Sarasota Ballet is presenting 14 ballets consisting of six Company premieres and a program dedicated to resident choreographer Ricardo Graziano in the 2019-2020 season including Matthew Hart’s “John Ringling’s Circus Nutcracker.” In addition to the principal dancers, the Company consists of 46 dancers and eight apprentices.

Founded in 1987 by Jean Weidner Goldstein, the Ballet had its first performance in November 1990—the same year Eddy Toussaint was hired as Director. From 1994 to 2007 Robert de Warren was the Artistic Director. In 2007 Iain Webb was hired as Director, in 2012 Margaret (Maggie) Barbieri was hired as Assistant Director, and in 2016 Joseph Volpe was hired as Executive Director.

Kate says, “I’m not blessed with natural gifts. I’m not tall. I don’t have the most amazing physique. I have a unique voice. But I love performing. I’m not afraid to leave my comfort zone to do comedy and theatrical. As a lead dancer, I have the most challenging roles, but I don’t always have the lead roles and don’t dance in every ballet. As Assistant Ballet Mistress, I assist Maggie with rehearsals which means I have to learn all choreography and counts. Iain, Maggie,

and Joe Volpe are instrumental in all that I’ve achieved. And Ballet Master Pavel Fomin taught me everything I know and who still corrects me as I learn from him every day.”


Regarding the rigors of dancing, Kate says, “Dancing combines physical and mental aspects. There are some days when the body doesn’t want to cooperate and learning so many ballets can be mentally overwhelming. I cross-train by running for stamina, attending hip hop exercise class and boot camp class for cardio. I know every day in the studio could be my last day as I’m the oldest female dancer, but I love the challenge of the artistry, style, and character. I am passionate about The Sarasota Ballet because I have the opportunity to do different styles and choreographers. I hope to always be a part of The Sarasota Ballet by teaching the high standards of the organization to dancers, working with children, and as a ballet mistress.”



Ricardo Graziano, Principal Dancer and Resident Choreographer of the Company, says, “Dancing and working alongside your best friend is a gift of itself, but getting to share the stage and getting to create ballets on such a talented woman is quite the honor. I usually say Kate can walk on water. She will make the impossible possible while making it look easy and effortless. She never ceases to impress me and she is such an inspiration in ballet and in life. She will stop at nothing to make sure her family, friends, coworkers, and community are surrounded with the best she can offer.”

Kate is one of the teachers of Dancing through Parkinson’s as it is personal to her—her mother Lisa Walsh has the disease. Kate knew she had to do something for her mother and attended training in Birmingham, Alabama, with David Leventhal and participated in an online course. (Dancing Through Parkinson’s with The Sarasota Ballet meets on the first and third Tuesdays monthly, 11:30am - 12:30pm. You can find out more Dancing Through Parkinson’s at Neuro Challenge Foundation for Parkinson’s at www.parkinsonsneurochallenge.org).

The dancers’ contracts at The Sarasota Ballet are seasonal from late August to the beginning of May. The dancers are in rehearsals now for November performances, the Nutcracker, and the January piece. Ballet class is every morning Monday through Friday. Rehearsals are six hours a day except Saturday when rehearsal is three hours. Since summer is a layoff period, Kate went with the company when it performed at The Joyce Theater in New York City two summers ago. Kate also has taught intensive and company classes in the summer here and in Colorado.

Kate met her husband Dex Honea, a former professional dancer and now a freelance photographer, when they were both dancers at The Sarasota Ballet and married in 2004. They have a poodle and a bichon frise. Her father Matt Walsh is Editor and CEO of the Observer Media Group, mother Lisa Walsh is Vice President, sister Emily Walsh is Publisher, and brother Bryan Walsh is a Marine Captain. Kate’s personal time is spent with family and shopping. A lesson from her professional career is to dream big, never give up on a dream, and work hard to achieve the dream.

Editor’s note: The second program of The Sarasota Ballet’s 2019–2020 Season, Symphonic Tales, showcases the choreographic variety featured in the company’s repertoire and brings a company premiere by George Balanchine to stage November 22–23 at the Sarasota Opera House. More info at www.sarasotaballet.org. 

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