

ventana

FINE LIVING IN VENTURA COUNTY

monthly

PERFECT STORM

A WHIRLWIND OF ARTISTIC EXPRESSION

DRAWN OUT

Comic art and the patriarch of the free press

RANCHO DEL OSO

The imprints of an art-fueled family

DREAMWEAVER

Moria's meditative mission

AUGUST 2013

The Perfect **STORM**

Painting, music, and dance converge in a whirlwind of artistic expression.

By Nancy D. Lackey Shaffer

ARTWALK VENTURA arrived in grand style last month, with a unique multimedia presentation taking center stage. A marriage of painting, music, and dance, *Convergence* highlighted creative collaboration at its finest, as Ventura County Ballet Company's best dancers spun across a stage illuminated by the fluid, lyrical images of Gerd Koch, ArtWalk Ventura's Artist of Distinction for 2013. Simultaneously, violinist Yue Deng and pianist/composer Miguel del Aguila, internationally acclaimed virtuosos who live in Ojai and Camarillo, respectively, played the score.

Bringing art to life has rarely been so beautifully, or *literally*, conceived. But more extraordinary, perhaps, is how so many local luminaries came together to create the experience and support Ventura's art scene.

The presentation was the brainchild of Donna Granata, founder of Focus on the Masters, which put on the program. Harnessing her expertise and impressive connections, Granata pooled a formidable array of talent for the one-of-a-kind event.





ART

Artist of Distinction Gerd Koch is a renowned abstract impressionist painter who taught at Ventura College for 32 years. As a student, Granata took one of Koch's courses, "Exploring the Visual Arts." Students created slides of their art and projected them onto figures as part of their classwork. "I loved that project, and those abstractions," Granata recalls. "It was one of these assignments that lit a spark."

Koch loved the idea of *Convergence*. "I see my work as visual music, because my paintings have gestural strokes," he explains. "I've been very interested in modern dance. There's a similar vocabulary to dance and music and art." Granata, an accomplished photographer, shot dozens of Koch's paintings to create digital images she could project.

DANCE

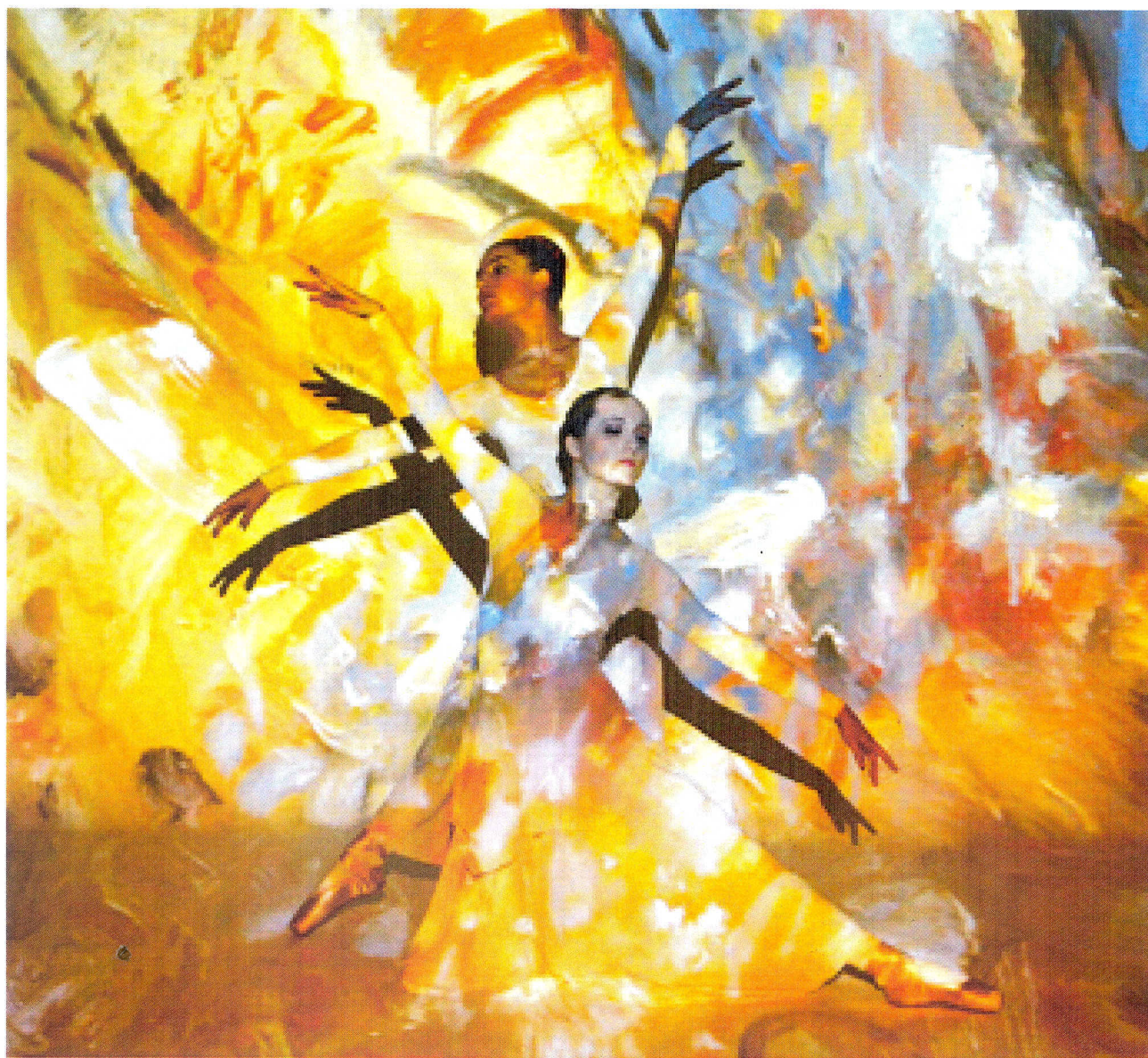
Ventura County Ballet Company's elite dance ensemble, DAnce ART, features the company's preeminent dancers as well as chosen

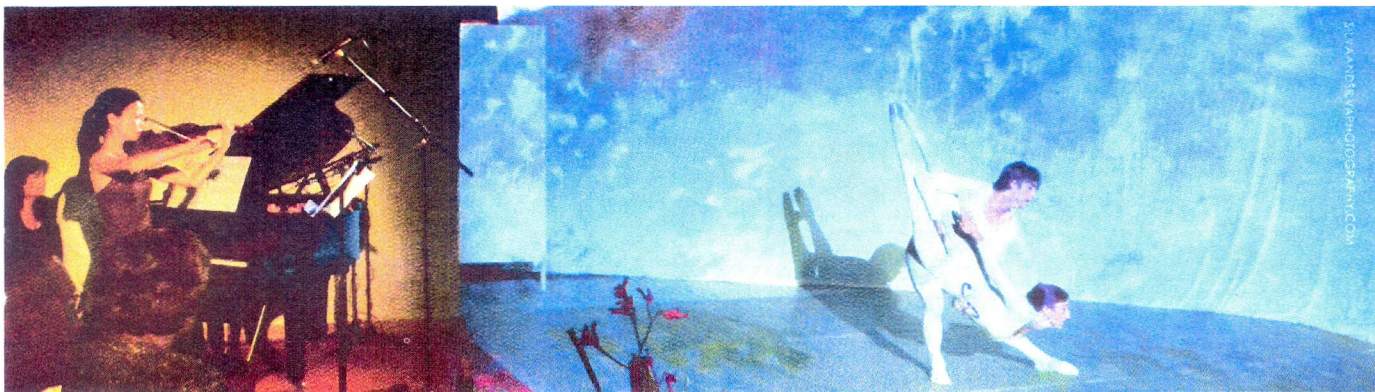
professionals. The group was custom-made for this ambitious production. "We're trying to approach the community to show them that ballet comes in all forms," says Kathleen Noblin, the founder of VCBC. "VCBC is a classical ballet company, but *Convergence* was very contemporary. It shows a different side of us."

Granata brought the dancers into her studio for some photo sessions. They were essentially bathed in Koch's art, and found themselves engaging with it intuitively. "They'd see a pool of blue on the floor and put their toes into it like it was a pool of water," recalls Eileen Riddle, VCBC's board president. "They just played with the light and let it inspire them." The resulting photos are breathtaking: elegant bodies veiled in a swirl of colors and textures, suggesting a figure from a painting coming to life. The line between art and reality is obscured. Granata made mounted prints of select photos to be sold at auction, with the proceeds benefitting FOTM Educational Programming. They also gave her and choreographer Brett Weidlich a sense of how the performance would look.

ABOVE:
Donna Granata
with Gerd
Koch, ArtWalk
Ventura's Artist
of Distinction for
2013.

**OPPOSITE AND
TOP LEFT:**
The fluidity of
ballet merges
with projected
images of Koch's
paintings.





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LAURA GOUTCHER



MUSIC

A native of the Czech Republic who trained in Russia and has danced in and choreographed productions across Europe and North America, Weidlich worked closely with composer Miguel del Aguila to get a sense for how the music should shape the choreography. Del Aguila is a highly regarded contemporary classical musician and composer, originally from Uruguay, who lived in Vienna before coming to Ventura County in 1992. He has more than 100 works and numerous honors (including two Grammy nominations) to his name, and his music lends itself well to a visual narrative. "To me, music is like a play without words," he explains. "I always have a movie playing in my head when I'm composing."

The relationship between composer and choreographer is notorious for being volatile. But for Weidlich and del Aguila, *Convergence*

was the start of a respectful friendship. "Brett is a good musician," del Aguila says of Weidlich. "He understands the music in depth." For his part, Weidlich says that del Aguila's music is "very well dance-articulated. He has an appreciation and knowledge of classical dance."

Convergence came at a serendipitous time. Del Aguila was just finishing his latest composition, "Silencio," a piece for piano and violin to accompany a *pas de deux*, a ballet dance designed for two people. Inspired by the recent death of his brother Nelson, del Aguila created a particularly poignant work, a composition filled with emotion. "Silencio" speaks of the emptiness left by loss, and *Convergence* marked its West Coast premiere.

Whereas "Silencio" is slow and introspective, "Seducción" is energetic and intense. Five dancers performed while del Aguila

CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE: Silent auction items; ivory tickler and composer Miguel del Aguila; violinist Yue Deng and Dance ART performers; Donna Granata shoots during rehearsal.



ALISA COUCHER

ABOVE: Choreographer Brett Weidlich works with performers from Ventura County Ballet Company's elite dance ensemble, Dance ART.

and Deng strutted their instrumental prowess. Bringing Yue Deng into the project was a tremendous coup. The Chinese-born, Juilliard-trained violinist has worked with everyone from Jean-Yves Thibaudet to Barbara Streisand, and most recently was concertmaster and violin soloist for the Pacific Shores Philharmonic. *Convergence* was Deng's last performance in Ventura County before leaving for Canada—another stroke of luck for the production, which seemed to be favored by the Muses from its inception.

CONVERGENCE

When fiercely talented individuals come together, it can become a clash of the titans: conflicting visions, warring egos, jockeying for prominence and credit. But from the outset, all the principals involved in *Convergence* seemed to be in synch.

According to Granata, the group was nothing less than a mutual admiration society. "Everybody was so respectful of each other's expertise," she recalls. "Every single artist was being honored by the other." **V**

VENTURA COUNTY BALLET COMPANY

VCBC features professional dancers as well as pre-professionals and students from Ballet Academy Ventura. For more information, call 805.648.2080 or visit venturacountyballet.com.

FOCUS ON THE MASTERS

Sign up for FOTM's E-Newsletter at focusonthemasters.com. For details, call 805.653.2501 or stop into the office at 505 Poli St., Suite 405, Ventura.

ARTWALK VENTURA

For more information about ArtWalk Ventura, log on to westsideartwalk.org or email info@westsideartwalk.org.