

HAWAII'S OWN LUXURY LIFESTYLE MAGAZINE

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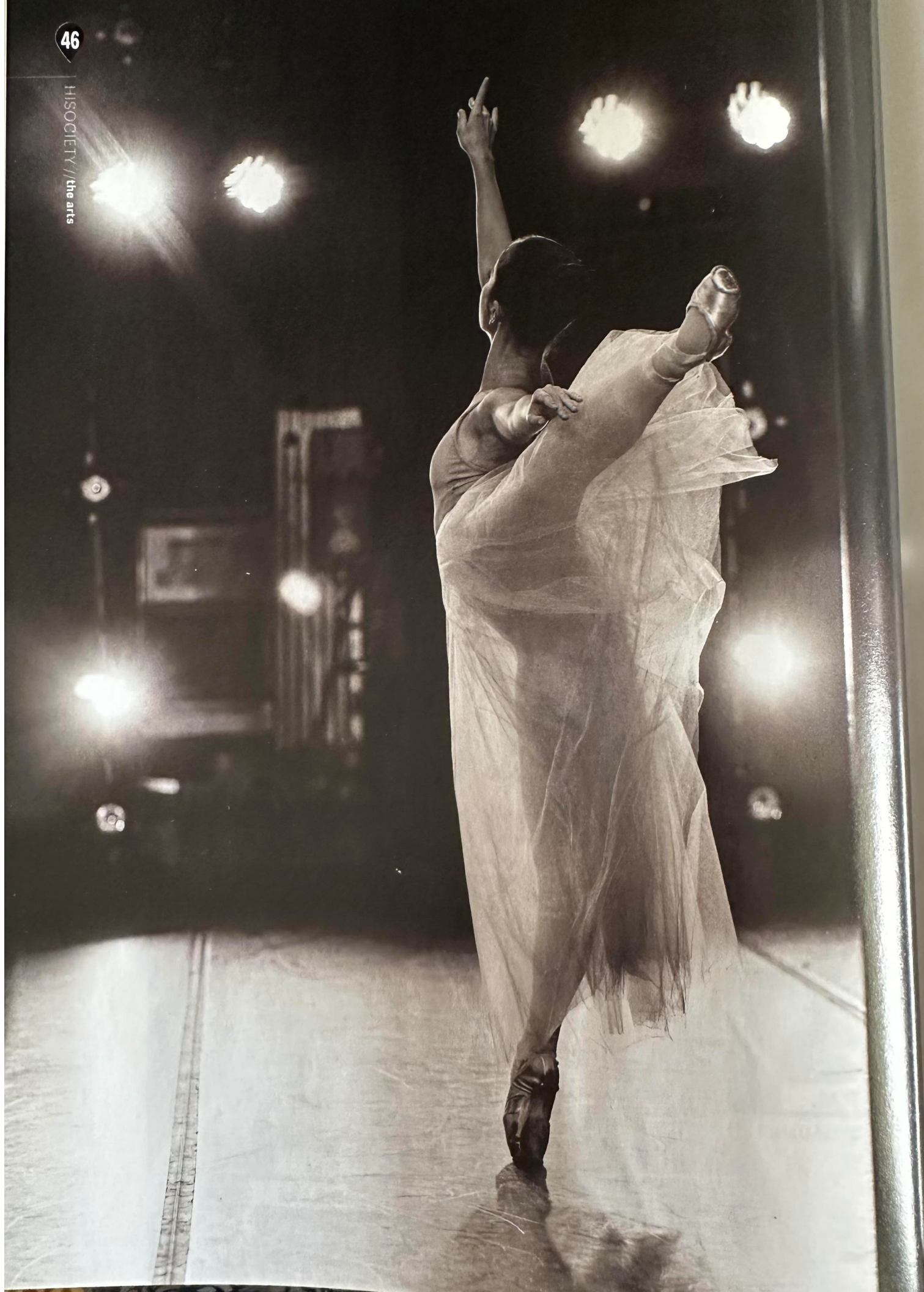
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Interior Motives

Breeze Giannasio brings
her distinctive design
style back to Hawai'i
and beyond.



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"Our goal is to give every child all the characteristics they need to be successful in life ..."

Between its two locations in Honolulu and Waipahu, Ballet Hawai'i today has a yearly enrollment of more than 500 students.

Master of the House

Meet Richard Vida, Ballet Hawai'i's new executive director.

text MICHAEL DORSEY

When Richard Vida became the new executive director of Ballet Hawai'i this past March, it represented the culmination of a relationship that dates back more than 30 years. Having regularly taught master classes in dance and musical theater for ballet students in Honolulu, Vida was no stranger to the Islands, or the dancers who call Hawai'i home.

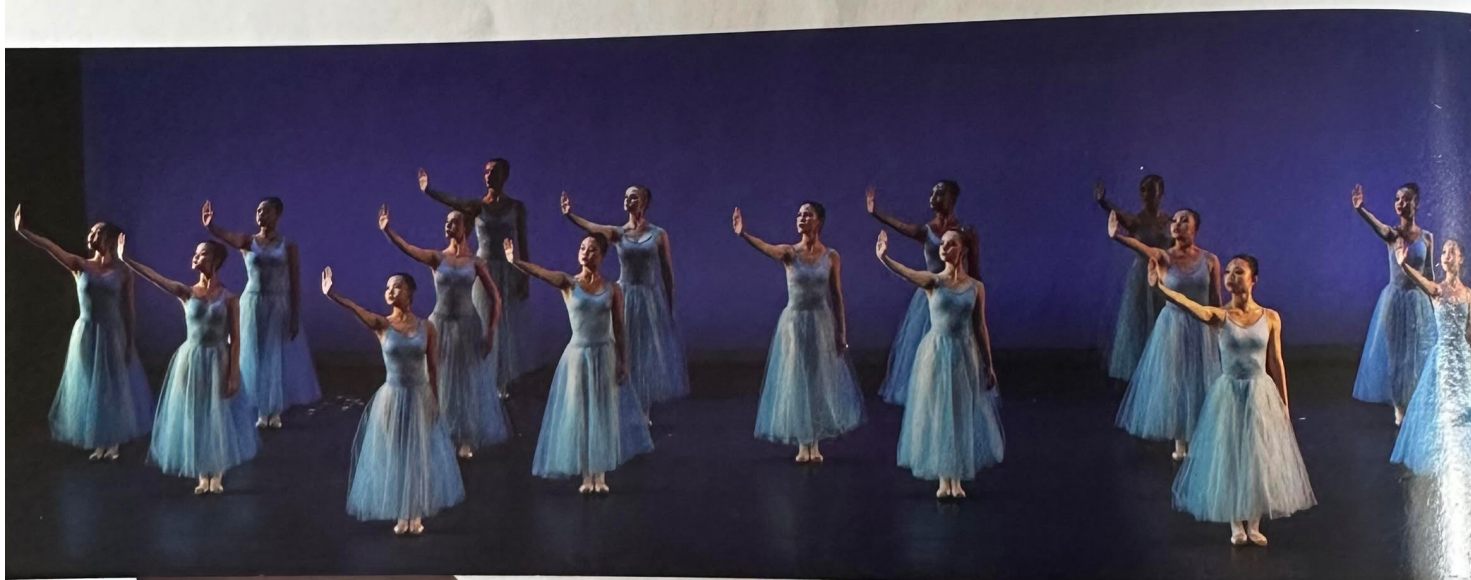
"Young people here are so accustomed to music and dance as part of the local culture. I found that dancers in Hawai'i have flourishing imaginations and are often much more accessible than many of my students on the mainland," Vida says. "That passion is something that always kept me coming back."

Honolulu is a far cry from the Broadway stages where Vida first made a

name for himself. Born and raised in Hartford, Connecticut, Vida had an interest in dancing and performing from a young age — much to the chagrin of his mother, a medical secretary, and his father, the vice president of a construction company. "As the firstborn child of Portuguese immigrants, they had no idea what to do with a creative kid," laughs Vida. "My parents would have preferred I pursue a more traditional career path. But I always knew that I was going to be on Broadway. It was never a question for me."

Vida took acting classes throughout high school. He was in the drama club and starred in all the school musicals. After high school, Vida moved to New York City, where he joined the cast of the original Broadway production of *Les Misérables* in 1987. Over the next 20 years, Vida became a Broadway regular

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who also appeared in the touring productions of *42nd Street*, *Anything Goes*, and *Singin' in the Rain*.

At the same time, Vida began working behind the scenes in a different variety of theatrical roles — as a production manager, box office manager, fundraising events director, casting producer, even investor.

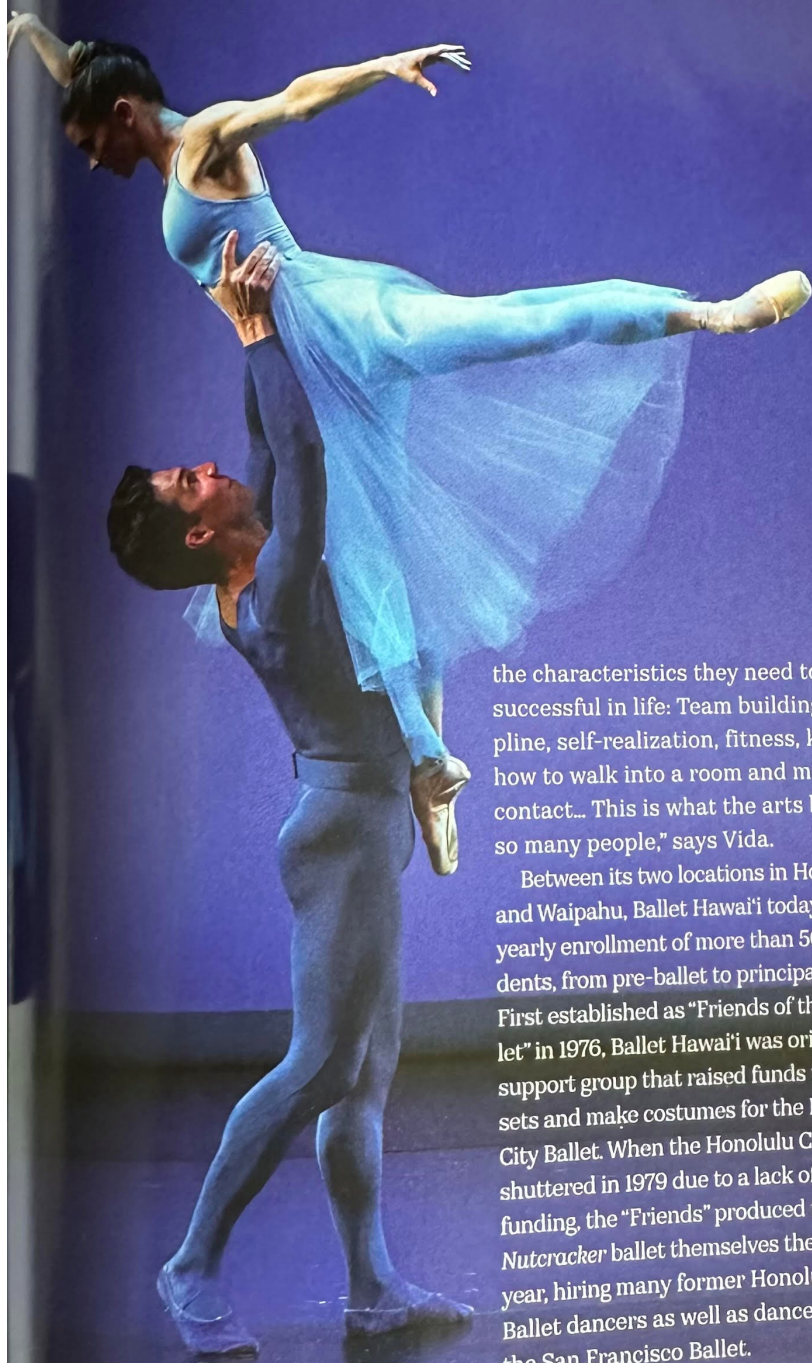
"I was always both left- and right-brained," he says. "I was creative but I also loved the business side of the arts, which helped when I turned 35 and realized I needed to figure out what I was going to do next after my dance career ended."

Vida became a producer and talent director for Big Chief Entertainment, which produced award-winning documentaries for Discovery, HGTV, and USA Networks. Seven years (and three

Emmy wins) later, Vida's agents called and he returned to Broadway for another ten years. In 2010, Vida played the opportunistic innkeeper Thénardier — which he originally understudied on Broadway — for the 25th anniversary production of *Les Misérables* at The O2 arena in London. All while continuing to run theatre companies, sit on the board of theatre organizations, teach and produce.

It's been a busy few decades. Vida's grateful for his latest starring role as executive director of Ballet Hawai'i, which allows him to guide the next generation of dancers and performers not only on stage but also in life.

"Ballet Hawai'i is not solely in the business of creating professional artists. Our goal is to give every child all



the characteristics they need to be successful in life: Team building, discipline, self-realization, fitness, knowing how to walk into a room and make eye contact... This is what the arts bring to so many people," says Vida.

Between its two locations in Honolulu and Waipahu, Ballet Hawai'i today has a yearly enrollment of more than 500 students, from pre-ballet to principal dancers. First established as "Friends of the Ballet" in 1976, Ballet Hawai'i was originally a support group that raised funds to build sets and make costumes for the Honolulu City Ballet. When the Honolulu City Ballet shuttered in 1979 due to a lack of federal funding, the "Friends" produced their first *Nutcracker* ballet themselves the following year, hiring many former Honolulu City Ballet dancers as well as dancers from the San Francisco Ballet.

That 1980 *The Nutcracker* at the Blaisdell was nearly sold out. The show has continued to be a hit for Ballet Hawai'i more than 40 years later, despite relocating to a temporary home at the Blaisdell Arena while the Blaisdell Concert Hall is undergoing renovations.

"It's such a different space. Everything was reimagined with beautiful, animated projections because we couldn't use the set we had for

the concert hall," Vida says. "However, the arena allows for bigger audiences. When we're at the concert hall, there's a 2,000-person capacity. At the arena, we had around 3,600 people attend each performance last year, which is huge."

Ballet Hawai'i's *The Nutcracker* is choreographed by Septime Webre, artistic director of the Hong Kong Ballet, and features accompaniment by members of the Hawai'i Symphony Orchestra plus dancers from New York City Ballet, Pacific Northwest Ballet, Carolina Ballet and Eugene Ballet. Set in the 1858 Kingdom of Hawai'i, Ballet Hawai'i's unique *Nutcracker* is specific to the Islands. Instead of the fictional Stahlbaum house in Germany, the children gather in Washington Place to open their presents with historical characterizations of Queen Lili'uokalani and Mary Dominis. The "Waltz of the Flowers" includes Crown Flowers, Plumeria and Hibiscus, while the "Waltz of the Snowflakes" is set atop Mauna Kea. The uniforms of the toy soldiers are patterned after those of the Royal Guards of the Kingdom of Hawai'i.

"There are about 130 people in the cast. The youngest is seven years old and it goes up to ageless, because one of the original members of the Friends of the Ballet is still part of *The Nutcracker* every year," says Vida. "The talent in Hawai'i is exceptional. I just can't wait to share it with the world — that's why I'm here." ♦

Tickets for Ballet Hawai'i's *The Nutcracker* go on sale this October. Visit ballethawaii.org for information.