

Southold Dance Theater honors departing artistic director Erica Fischbach with performance

By Selena Ponio South Bend Tribune Aug 4, 2016



Members of the Southold Dance Theatre are shown performing Aug. 8, 2015, at the Chris Wilson Pavilion in Potawatomi Park as part of the Community Foundation of St. Joseph County's Performing Arts Series. Southold performs in the series again Saturday, and that also will be artistic director Erica Fischbach's final show with Southold before she moves to Denver to work at the the Colorado Ballet. Photo provided/Community Foundation of St. Joseph County

For most people, Saturday's performance by Southold Dance Theater at the Chris Wilson Pavilion in Potawatomi Park will be an opportunity to enjoy the local arts on one of the last nights of summer.

But for Southold artistic director Erica Fischbach, the performance holds more significance than any other.

The night marks Fischbach's last big show with Southold as well as the end of her nine-year tenure at the South Bend-based dance company. Afterward, she heads to Denver to begin her new career at the Colorado Ballet as the academy principal and the director of the Youth America Grand Prix program.

Although she's excited about the job in Denver and that city's thriving artistic community, Fischbach says she has mixed emotions about the move.

“When they created a position and asked me to join officially, my initial reaction was kind of like, ‘Oh no,’” she says. “I was excited, but I also love Southold, I love South Bend, and I think that this school and youth company is a gem in our community.”

During her time at Southold, Fischbach has been recognized for her instruction, choreography and adaptations of classic ballets that incorporate dancers of all ages at the dance company. She helped Southold establish prominence at the Youth America Grand Prix (YAGP) competition, the world’s largest international dance competition, and she won YAGP’s “Outstanding Teacher” award in 2013 and 2015.

Fischbach says the hardest part of her job transition has been having to say goodbye to the dancers and families at Southold.

“I have never been in a community where the families are so generous,” she says. “There were a lot of tears, including my own, but also a lot of support.”

Brad Beutter, vice president of Southold’s board of directors, says that as a parent of a daughter who has been dancing at Southold for 13 years, he has witnessed firsthand Fischbach’s ability to capitalize on the potential of each student as well as command respect from each of those she instructs.

“I think that’s the sign of a good teacher, to really work and understand each student individually,” he says. “She brings a level of discipline that’s needed for ballet but does it in a way that fosters the development of the dancers in a very positive way.”

Diana Green, president of the board of directors, says that although the Southold community is disappointed by Fischbach's departure, it's also happy for her because it is a well-deserved step in her career. Some of Fischbach's former dancers will perform pieces in tribute to her at Saturday's performance, and Green says she believes the students will dance with extra heart Saturday to honor Fischbach and as a testament to the way she has taught them.

The first act features various pieces and showcases choreography that students learned from the summer intensive programs. The second act has more of a sequential storyline and features excerpts from the ballet of "Don Quixote." There are 50 kids involved in the production with ages ranging from 10 to 18. The two guest artists are Dawnell Dryja, a company member at Grand Rapids Ballet, and Attila Mosolyto, ballet master at Grand Rapids Ballet.

Green says she anticipates the performance to be a memorable one and one that showcases the Southold community's immense gratitude for Fischbach's investment of her time and talents into the school.

"Erica is not only a teacher and a coach and a mentor to her students, she also takes a motherly interest in all of them," Green says. "She loves them and cares for them ... and does everything she can to help them on the path for their dance career."