



NANCY Henderek

FOUNDER, DANCE SALAD

Nancy Henderek does her part placing Houston on the global dance map, thanks to her annual three-day international dance festival that draws dance enthusiasts, presenters and VIPs from all over the world.

As founder and artistic director of Dance Salad, Henderek conceived the festival while living in Brussels, where she held the first three festivals. When she moved back to Houston, she brought the “Salad” with her, making Houston a destination dance city.

“Every ballet is an individual ingredient, but they all must mix together,” she says.

As founder and artistic director of Dance Salad, Henderek regularly attends top international dance festivals and presenter conferences to select each year’s lineup, which often features a company or choreographer who has never been seen before in the U.S. She prefers the hands-on approach and actually selects each piece of choreography, rather than the troupe, to organize the show into an exciting three-day extravaganza. Henderek also works tirelessly with each artistic director to excerpt evening-length works into a manageable length for a festival audience.

“I am more of a curator of a dance museum,” she insists. “I enjoy the creative part of putting it all together most of all.”

Logistics, such as fundraising, securing visas and program planning, are not so simple. Henderek, an expert on visas, has to figure out how to bring all these international artists to Houston. Over the years, she’s had some harrowing last-minute crises with dancers from Cuba and other locales.

“Sometimes, we become an expert in something we have no desire to be an expert in,” she says.

Born in Kansas City and raised near in Bethesda, Md., Henderek moved to Houston



Interview | NANCY WOZNY Photography | MARK LIPCZYNSKI

in 1972 with her husband Michael, a former Exxon Mobil executive. The couple hopscotched across the globe, living in Brussels, France, Germany, Sweden and Hong Kong.

“I consider myself a citizen of the world,” she says with pride. “One of the perks of my profession is that my circle of friends is truly international, and just keeps getting larger.”

Now celebrating its 15th anniversary, this year’s Dance Salad features several never-before-seen troupes and highlights including Budapest’s Hungarian National Ballet Company, one of the oldest ballet companies in Europe; Ballet de Lorraine from Nancy, France; Norwegian National Ballet of Oslo, Norway; and Royal Ballet of Flanders from Antwerp, Belgium.

When all the dancers arrive, usually from a dozen countries or so, Henderek likes to bask in the excitement she has created. Any number of languages can be heard backstage at the Wortham during “Salad” days.

“It’s funny,” she ponders, “I am the most relaxed when the festival is actually happening, although I always wish I had more time to visit with the dancers.”

When she’s not traipsing the globe shopping for outstanding choreography to bring to Houston, you can find Henderek sorting through heaps of DVDs or spending time with her two adult sons and her grandchildren.

“I love them dearly and they are such a rich part of my life now,” she says. “Dance and family fill my life.” ♣