

Thanks, ORANGE COUNTY REGISTER! Reporter Anne Valdespino's "Eye on OC" piece on Visual Immersion ran in today's edition, with a photo gallery by Drew A. Kelley. For those of you unable to breach the OCR's paywall, here is Anne's article in its entirety:

Performers in the courtyard and on a balcony at Seven Degrees lifted spirits of the Laguna Dance Festival supporters attending the Visual Immersion gala just as much as the welcoming glasses of sparkling wine. When festival founder Jodie Gates and friends throw a party, they pull out all the stops to make it as inventive as possible.

"We wanted it to be artsy and dance-oriented," said Edie Tonkon, co-chairwoman of the event with Nancy Meyer.

"We wanted to do something very visual, and this space is so contemporary," Meyer said.

Guests enjoyed pre-dinner cocktails on the hillside terrace and a chance to meet honoree and festival advisory board member Desmond Richardson, an artist who embodies Gates' eclectic vision of the festival. He defines well-rounded with his accomplishments in classical and contemporary dance, on Broadway, and as a dancer with pop singers Prince, Madonna and Michael Jackson. He was thrilled with the award and entertained the crowd with funny and touching stories, as well as a surprise announcement that he wants to move his New York-based company, Complexions, to the West Coast.

"Jodie inviting me here to Laguna to be a part of the festival ...and to have the support of you guys has been incredible," he said.

Richardson wasn't the only luminary turning heads. Philanthropist Glorja Kaufman attended, showing her support for Gates, who will be the founding director of the new Glorja Kaufman School of Dance at USC. Gates' new colleague Robert Cutietta, dean of the Thornton School of Music, also turned out. So did students from UC Irvine's Claire Trevor School of the Arts, where Gates was on the faculty. Nia-Amina Minor and Mlondolozzi Zondi danced in the ensemble of a piece they choreographed, "Ceremonious."

Gates beamed as she invited everyone to the festival and continued to sing Richardson's praises.

"He is the artist we're all looking to be, the Renaissance man," she said. "He has raised the bar for all of us."

Up next:

The Laguna Dance Festival will present concerts by Parsons Dance (Sept. 5-6) and Aspen Santa Fe Ballet (Sept. 7-8) at the Laguna Playhouse. For tickets and information, visit lagunadancefestival.com

- A.V. — at [Seven-Degrees](#).

