

A portrait of Glorlya Kaufman, a woman with short, wavy, light brown hair, wearing a dark green, pleated, long-sleeved dress. She is seated in a chair with a floral patterned backrest. Her right hand is resting on her chin, and she is wearing a large, ornate ring with a red and white stone. The background is a textured, teal-colored wall.

GLORYA KAUFMAN
ENDOWS A NEW
SCHOOL OF DANCE
AT USC

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To Gloria Kaufman, the art of dance is a gift on several levels

The philanthropist, who recently gave USC an undisclosed sum to fund a new dance school, has grand ambitions for the L.A. arts scene.

By Deborah Vankin

Tall, sinewy women, their necks thin and erect, mingle in wispy dresses on the arms of broad-shouldered men under the twinkling white lights of the canopied back patio at the Beverly Hills Four Seasons. As dusk fades and cocktails are served, the black-tie crowd moves with a particular rhythmic elegance. Maybe that's because some of the country's biggest names in dance are here. There are Debbie Allen, Diavolo Dance Theater's Jacques Heim, choreographer and one-time Joffrey prima ballerina Jodie Gates, as well as Complexions Contemporary Ballet co-founder and dancer Desmond Richardson.

But the new biggest name in dance is Gloria Kaufman, who shook up the arts world last month when she gave the University of Southern California a gift that despite its undisclosed amount, has been called one of the largest donations in dance history.

Kaufman, wearing a brown velvet Christian Lacroix gown and her red hair in a neat twist, hugs a steady stream of old and new friends who have flown in from New York, Austin, Detroit and all over California to celebrate her gift. Curiosity over the dollar amount bubbles throughout the crowd.

Even before the night's event, Kaufman was known as the dancing philanthropist. In 2009, she gave \$20 million to Los Angeles' Music Center so that major dance companies could perform in Southern California through her Gloria Kaufman Presents Dance. And she gave \$18 million to UCLA's School of Arts and Architecture



Philanthropist Gloria Kaufman at her Beverly Hills home.

in 1999 to renovate the dance building. Her hope was that the university would eventually create a dedicated school of dance.

Now she is getting her wish at a different university with the announcement that USC will establish a dance school in her name. It will be the first endowment-funded school that USC has started in 40 years. And it has the possibility of transforming the city's dance landscape.

"It's groundbreaking, considering the level of people Gloria wants to bring into it — a Juilliard on the West Coast," Richardson says. After nearly two decades in New York, Richardson — who tonight performs a contemporary ballet solo in

honor of Kaufman — is looking to move his dance company to Los Angeles.

It seems that Southern California might at last be ready for a grand expansion of its dance scene. But is USC ready for Kaufman?

She is the first to admit that she's famously hands-on with the projects she funds. For the Donald Bruce Kaufman branch library in Brentwood, she says, "I picked out every color and every chair and the wood; I did the same thing at UCLA." Of the new USC dance school's interior, Kaufman adds: "I will have a lot to say about it."

Kaufman aims to be as involved as pos-

PHOTO BY AL SEIB

sible in every aspect of the USC school, from helping design the contemporary and classical dance curriculum and hiring world-class faculty to constructing a brand-new building, the Glorlya Kaufman International Dance Center.

USC President C.L. Max Nikias is undaunted and calls Kaufman “an extraordinary woman with an extraordinary heart” who has “a rare generosity of spirit and a deep passion for dance.”

But there are few who know Kaufman beyond the fact of her generosity. For all her very public gestures nurturing dance and other civic efforts over the past three decades, Kaufman is an especially private person. She has given few in-person interviews over the years.

So it's a little surprising when Kaufman extends an invitation to her home on a recent fall morning. The long, sloping driveway leading to her Beverly Hills home is lined with whimsical resin sculptures. Brightly colored ladies pop up from the bushes, striking ballet-like poses. The morning light dances off their curves, casting geometric shadows across the concrete.

Kaufman swings open the front door herself, offering a warm hug and a tour of her new \$18.2-million home, designed like an Italian villa. It's her version of downsizing. Until recently she lived in the same massive Brentwood ranch house where, with her late husband, Donald Bruce Kaufman, she raised four children — Curtis, Gayl, Laura and Zuade, publisher of the progressive website Truthdig.com — and also saw the birth of 10 grandchildren. Unhung paintings and open boxes sit tucked away in corners, but otherwise, the house is unpacked, immaculate even, with its creamy, Italian marble floors, woven rugs and large collection of Deco-era artwork.

As she strides across the living room in slacks and a silky black blazer, Kaufman points out signed Erté tables, Venetian art glass and a wall of Louis Icart prints. Art, music and especially dance is what moves Kaufman, breathes meaning into her life, she says. She took up painting in the early 1970s and proudly shows off three of her works: an impressionistic floral, a still life of a woman's nude back and a bold geometric abstract. They are strikingly different in

form and style.

“Change is who I am,” Kaufman says. “That's why I'm drawn to dance — it's moving, always changing.”

Kaufman learned to dance, she says, before she could walk. Her father, a seasoned dancer, would glide around the family's Detroit living room in the mid-1930s with Kaufman on his toes. As a child, she fondly remembers watching her parents dance across the floors of their apartment. Her mother was active in Jewish charities; her father was production manager of Automotive News.

“I loved how they looked at each other,” she says. Deep down, Kaufman wanted to be a dancer when she grew up, but there was no money for lessons. Instead, she learned from friends, who held boy-girl dances in their basement rec rooms. “The rumba, the samba, the twist. We picked up from each other. It was such a wonderful way to grow up.”

Dance is also how Kaufman — then Glorlya Pinkis — knew that a young, struggling home builder in Detroit would become the love of her life. She was in her late teens and popular in her crowd when a neighbor set her up on a blind date with Donald Kaufman. The two took in a Cinerama movie, all the rage at the time, then dinner, followed by ballroom dancing.

“He held me in his arms and that was it,” she says. “I went home and said to my dad, ‘If I can get him, that's who I'm gonna marry!’”

Back then, Kaufman says, she only wanted “a little house with kids.” She couldn't have possibly foreseen the empire that Donald Kaufman would build with fellow Detroitier Eli Broad.

Kaufman's first cousin, Edythe Lawson, married Broad, who was then a CPA. When her husband and Broad co-founded the company that became the Fortune 500 Kaufman & Broad, now KB Home, she says Broad borrowed money from her “Uncle Mori,” Morris Lawson, who was also Edythe's dad. (Broad, who declined to be interviewed for this article, said through his office that the sum was \$12,500; Kaufman insists it was \$25,000.) Kaufman herself sold her brand new aqua Ford and a few pieces of jewelry to help Donald scrape together his portion of the

upstart funds. The men bought two lots 13 miles outside Detroit to showcase their vision.

“Eli was the man who negotiated with the banks, and Don was the homebuilder and visionary,” Kaufman says. “Together they were great.”

Broad and Glorlya Kaufman see each other at public events from time to time, but they don't socialize. “We live different lives,” she says. “I'm a single woman and he has a family.”

In 1983, Donald — an avid scuba diver, hang glider, parachutist and skier — died at 60 in a single-engine biplane crash with their son-in-law Eyal Horowitz, who was 26. Their daughter Gayl was pregnant with Horowitz's child at the time and was with Kaufman at her home when they both received the news of the crash.

“They went to Santa Paula for lunch and never came back,” Kaufman says, her voice noticeably heavy. “Gayl lost her future and her past that day.”

Dance had mostly fallen by the wayside during her child-raising years, but within six months of Donald's death, Kaufman turned to charity work. Much of her energy focused on dance.

In addition to her Music Center and UCLA donations, Kaufman gave \$6 million to New York's Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater and \$3.5 million to the Juilliard School. The nonprofit Glorlya Kaufman Dance Foundation, which she founded in 2008, has nurtured children through dance at community organizations such as L.A.'s Inner-City Arts and the Mar Vista Family Center.

“Dance does so much to the spirit,” Kaufman says. “Self confidence, it crosses borders, it connects young kids in the nicest way.”

Endowing USC's new dance school feels like a return to building, to her Detroit roots, says Kaufman, who has two honorary doctorates, one from Fordham University, the other from Juilliard.

Robert Cutietta, who is dean of USC's music school and will head the dance school, says the new dance program will be small and selective, with 60 to 80 students. USC is set to break ground in early 2014 near the Thornton School of Music. The dance school is planned to open in fall 2015.

“We have so much talent here in L.A. and there’s no place for them to go,” Kaufman says. “We want to get the best students, the best teachers, and the kids, when they graduate, will be able to make a living right away.”

There are currently more than 120 active, professional dance companies in Los Angeles County, according to the Dance Resource Center of Greater L.A. — among them Diavolo, the Los Angeles Ballet, Danza Floricanto/USA and Lula Washington Dance Theatre. Not to mention hundreds of underground artists and pick-up companies that fly under the radar. But there are few dance-dedicated venues in the city, and there is no major institutionalized dance center on par with New York’s the Joyce Theater Foundation or Seattle’s On the Boards.

There have been notable attempts to rectify that. The Dance Gallery on Bunker Hill went through fundraising laps in the 1980s and was supposed to have archives, classes and a performance space. Ultimately, the project fizzled.

L.A.’s current dance scene, which now counts Benjamin Millepied’s L.A. Dance Project among its resident companies, is vibrant and culturally diverse. But given the geography of the city, it’s also spread out and fractured.

Choreographer Kate Hutter, who co-founded L.A. Contemporary Dance Company while an undergraduate at USC in 2004, sees an upside to those freewheeling dance roots. “There’s a real pioneering spirit to L.A. dance, which doesn’t have a lot of establishment to sit on,” she says. “I think that energy has asked us to be on the forefront and really create in adventurous ways.”

The new USC dance school, Hutter says, will kick things up a notch and break open opportunities for dancers outside of the standard music videos and commercials that sustain many who move to L.A. “The training that this school could provide would send them into a multitude

of careers.”

That’s exactly the point, says Kaufman: “My vision is for the students to leave and go into dance and the business of dance — to do whatever they want because they’ll be that talented and prepared.”

Still, some observers criticize that, for all her generosity, Kaufman has a limited vision of what dance could and should be.

Dan Froot, a professor in UCLA’s dance program, was a faculty advisor in a senior showcase that Kaufman attended about eight years ago. Some of the performances that night, he says, fell on the experimental side. Kaufman was less than pleased with what she saw. “We’re an interdisciplinary dance program — that’s what we do,” he says in the school’s defense.

Kaufman has no comment about the UCLA show, but in general, she says, “I like dance to be happy.”

Some speculate that USC will need a nine-figure amount to create a world-caliber dance school and wonder if Kaufman’s endowment — guesses range wildly from \$40 million to \$100 million — will be enough.

Bob Bursey, senior producer at Bard College’s Fisher Center for the Performing Arts, formerly with Bill T. Jones’ dance company, estimates that the simplest dance building USC could erect — just studio spaces, classrooms and offices, with no proper theater — would cost a minimum of \$20 million.

Charles McNeal, education director of the San Francisco Ballet’s Center for Dance Education puts the price tag higher: “The cost of dance, 90% of it is in the facility because it’s a building unlike any other kind of building. You need special ventilation, special lighting, special sprung floors with give. Even an intimate building, I cannot see being less than \$80 million.”

Add to that a curriculum plus a world-class faculty, and, McNeal says of the school’s total cost, “There’s no doubt in my mind we’re going past the \$150-million mark.”

USC’s new Student Health Center opening in January — at six stories high and 100,000 square feet — cost less than McNeal’s estimate, about \$50 million. The Glorlya Kaufman International Dance Center, even with its pricier custom needs, could easily be half that size, says Cutietta. And it won’t have a formal auditorium, just a black box theater.

“That’s a good comparison,” says Cutietta of the Student Health Center. “But we don’t know. We’re just putting out bids for architects. Glorlya’s gift covers at least half the construction plus quite a bit more that goes into an endowment.”

Kaufman is unfazed by the speculation. “Leave them guessing,” she says. As to why she remains so secretive: “It puts a number and value on a gift that’s from the heart. And that’s not why I do it.”

Indeed, Kaufman may have a thing about numbers — she is adamant about not revealing her age. She certainly won’t reveal how much, in all, she has donated to the arts thus far, or her net worth. Though neither of the Kaufmans ever made the Forbes list, at the time of her husband’s death, Kaufman & Broad had more than \$1 billion in assets. The Glorlya Kaufman Dance Foundation, in 2010, had about \$5.5 million in assets.

Kaufman will let slip one number: Given the opportunity, she’d dance seven nights a week if she could. Dance still infuses her life in the most intimate ways. She loves to ballroom dance when she can and only dates men who know their way around the floor. “So You Think You Can Dance” is one of her favorite shows — she never misses an episode. Other evenings are filled with nights out at the Geffen Playhouse and the Music Center.

Adding another iconic performance space to Los Angeles is as exciting to her as the productions that will happen inside. “To me, the building part is really part of the art. If I’m not painting, I have to be creating in some way, creating with ideas. And it’s ideas that make a difference.”