

The Dancer

MAGDALENA FERLA

Professional Ballet Dancer, Owner of Dance Theatre International, and Founder of San Jose Youth Ballet

"Dancers have to decide early if that's what they want to do," says ballet superstar Magdalena Ferla, who recalls training six days a week as a child. "Then, you just have to take your faith with you and follow it." Follow it is exactly what this San Jose local and founding owner of Dance Theatre International did, dancing her way across the world and back again with some of the most prestigious ballet companies.

Born in the Philippines, Ferla immigrated to California as an adolescent, where her parents and teachers encouraged her natural knack for ballet. "My mom was a hard worker and an example of what it takes to succeed in anything: perseverance, dedication, faith," she adds.

Ferla's dancing shoes took her first to train with San Francisco Ballet when she was just 16, where she joined the company at age 20 and danced for five years. Then it was off to world-renowned Bejart Ballet in Switzerland, where she both met her future husband and broke her foot on the first day of practice. "I had to split open my shoes in order to dance," Ferla recalls of performing after surgery with a metal plate in her foot. Her skill and spirit intact, Ferla went on to dance with the Hamburg Ballet.

Upon returning to San Jose at age 30, this dancer's next step was, naturally, to teach. "I started teaching ballet lessons at Grange Hall in Evergreen," she says. "From there, it just exploded and I thought, I've gotta have my own space." Local children can now leap and plie with her at Evergreen's Dance Theatre International ballet school, where Ferla invites renowned choreographers from across the globe to come teach alongside her. "I love watching the kids grow through dance and find themselves, seeing them explore different types of movement."

But her self-stated mission to "support high caliber performance arts opportunities for youth" is perhaps best brought to life through San Jose Youth Ballet, the nonprofit she has founded in the community. Each year, members of the community can audition to be part of the ballet's performance of *The Nutcracker*, which parents and non-dancers alike can pitch in to help produce. "I love that it is able to bring the community and families together in support of arts and youth," Ferla says. "I founded it in hopes of building those relationships."

Asked what her dreams are at this juncture in life, the spry 46-year-old mother of one says, "I would love all of my students to love the art of dance, and encourage the audience to love it too." We think she certainly has.

—LINDSAY SCHAUER

