

# VSPAC

VICKY SIMEGIATOS

PERFORMING ARTS CENTER

*at* 50

DIGITAL PRESS KIT



# The Vicky Simegiatos

## Performing Arts Center

founded 1972

In a world where mass produced chain stores dominate the landscape and young businesses struggle to survive, the Vicky Simegiatos Performing Arts Center has blazed their own trail, in their own beautiful style, for fifty years.

One young ballerina's dream has created . . .

Dance education for tens of thousands of neighborhood students, many who came to the studio as pre-schoolers and stay through high school and beyond.

Dozens of dance teachers trained directly at the studio.

Opportunities for students to attend workshops with accomplished guest artists from Broadway, television and the most famous companies

Dance teams who have brought tremendous artistry and technique to tri-state area competitions, achieving high scores and winning top awards.

Dozens of students accepted into major dance companies, nationally renowned elite conservatories, performing arts high schools and college programs.

A professional ballet company performing full length classical ballets for packed houses with principal dancers from New York City Ballet and American Ballet Theater as guest artists, attended and loved by thousands of community members, and given a glowing review by the lead dance critic of The New York Times.

A contemporary dance company performing original works by the studio's acclaimed choreographers alongside dances created for them by national stars.

An arts institution and tight knit community that has created happy memories and life-long friendships among its students, faculty and families.



# Vicky Simegiatos



President and Artistic Director, Vicky Simegiatos, was born and raised in Athens, Greece. At the age of five, she started studying classical ballet in Greece with Adam Morianov, a very famous Russian teacher. After completing high school, she received a Professional Diploma from the Minister of Cultural Affairs, with a degree in History and Theory of Dance. She also received a special Government license for Professional Teaching and Dancing. In Greece, as in most European countries, one must pass national level examinations in

order to fulfill the requirements necessary to teach professionally or to perform the art of dance.

In 1968, she was accepted as a member of the Ballet Company of the National Opera of Greece. In 1970, she came to the United States with a scholarship from the American Ballet Theatre, where she had the opportunity to be taught by the greatest teachers of the ballet world, such as Leon Danielian, Michael Maule, Madame Swoboda, Valentina Pereyaslavic, William Carter, and Patricia Wilde. She also studied jazz with Luigi and flamenco with Manolo Rivera and Victorio Corrihan.

Vicky had a very difficult time choosing between family and career. In 1972 she opened her first Dance Studio so that she

could raise her family and still give her students all the love for ballet in her heart. Through the years, her studios grew to three locations in Brooklyn. Today, the flagship location on Third Avenue occupies most of the building with three large sunny state-of-the-art studios. Most of the teaching faculty are Vicky's own students, who have studied with her for years and are able to teach with the same system and love that Vicky does.

Her dream had always been to organize a professional Dance Company that would be able to offer a training program for serious dancers to proceed in a career with the desire, dedication and determination needed to succeed. In 1982 Vicky founded the Vicky Simegiatos Dance Company, a non-profit organization, and only with the great support she has received from the Brooklyn community could her dream become reality!

Today she works in partnership with her daughters, Matina and Despina, who continue to bring their students new artistic experiences, and provide them with a well rounded education in the performing arts. Matina Simegiatos and husband Voytek Sporek are directors of the Music Department, offering vocal and musical theatre classes as well as lessons in piano, guitar and violin. Matina is also ballet mistress of the Vicky Simegiatos Dance Company. Despina Simegiatos directs, trains and choreographs for the studio's Competition Teams, who have won the highest awards and honors every time they've competed. It makes Vicky so proud to be part of this new era in the beautiful artistic journey of the Vicky Simegiatos Performing Arts Center.





# Matina Simegiatos



Matina Simegiatos-Sporek was born and raised in Brooklyn, NY into a lively performing arts family. Her mother was a ballerina and her father an opera singer, so Matina began her dance and voice training at home at a very young age. She started taking formal classes at her parents' performing arts center, The Vicky Simegiatos Performing Arts Center, at 18 months old, and continued throughout high school. She also studied at The School of American Ballet (SAB) for 10 years. Throughout her childhood, Matina performed in Broadway, and off Broadway, and numerous New York City Ballet productions at Lincoln Center. She had the great honor to work with Ray Charles, Ann Reinking, Jacques d'Amboise, and many more legendary performers in these productions.

As a teenager, Matina attended the LaGuardia High School of the Performing Arts as a vocal major while continuing her rigorous ballet training at SAB and VSPAC, and establishing a career for herself as a recording artist. At age 15, Matina signed as a solo artist with Atlantic Records and released her first hit single.

Matina went on to study at NYU, where she earned Bachelor degrees in Psychology and Journalism, and continued to work as a recording artist and the director of VSPAC's scholarship and musical theater programs.

As an adult, Matina performed leading roles in Broadway and an Off-Broadway productions. She also enjoyed more success as a recording artist with another hit single that climbed to #2 on the US Billboard charts, and #1 in Europe.

Matina directed, choreographed, and produced full length musicals and ballets for VSDC including The Wizard of Oz, Cinderella, Coppelia and The Nutcracker.

As co-artistic director for DeMA Dance, Matina has received critical acclaim for her choreography and multiple choreography awards from elite national dance competitions. Matina was also the casting director, editor and choreographer for Body Wrappers dance wear for almost 30 years, where she had the wonderful opportunity to direct Tiler Peck, Maria Kowroski, Robbie Fairchild, Ariana DeBose, Joaquin De Luz, Wendy Whelan, Sterling Hyltin, Billy Bell, and many more.

After many years of juggling the pressures and demands of her diverse career, rigorous training and exacting nature of her professions, Matina still considers her complex job as a mother and momager to be her most challenging undertaking. Her daughter Angelina, 17, and son Athan, 15, have had extensive careers on Broadway, film and tv, and Matina, along with her husband Voytek Sporek, have guided them every step of the way. This is how PLACES! was born, a TV series written by Matina which is currently in development with PH Entertainment and Black Sand Productions. PLACES! takes you through the wings and into the unconventional lives of a young star thrust into the backstage life and culture of Broadway, film and TV and their hard core family trying to hold things together behind the scenes. Matina is also writing her first dramatic screenplay about the Opera world set in 1981 during the emerging AIDS crisis.

Matina is excited about her new chapter in life as a screenwriter, and remains so passionate about continuing to inspire the students of the VSDC's scholarship and VSPAC's musical theater programs with the heartfelt and technical training she offers, her intricate choreography, and watchful eye.





# Despina Simegiatos



Despina was born into a family of dancers and musicians in Brooklyn, New York. Her mother was a principal dancer with the Greek National Ballet, her father a tenor with the Greek National Opera and her grandmother alongside her aunt, were the founders of the Hellenic Ballet Theatre. Despina began her ballet training at the early age of two at the Vicky Simegiatos Performing Arts Center and continued her studies at Broadway Dance Center, Steps NYC. She graduated from LaGuardia High School of the Performing Arts under the direction of Michelle Mathesius. Despina has worked extensively with an array of high profile masters in the field including Joe Lanteri, Deborah Zall, Elisa King, Penny Frank, Jacquelyn Buglisi, David

Howard, Madame Gabriela Darvash, and Brunilda Ruiz. She has also performed the works of Shapiro & Smith and Elisa King.

Despina's professional career began in 1992 when she joined Vicky Simegiatos Dance Company performing as a member of the corps de ballet.

In 1994 she was promoted as a principal dancer. Since then, Despina has been on the faculty as the main instructor and resident choreographer of the contemporary, jazz, and modern divisions for the Vicky Simegiatos Performing Arts Center. In 1997 she founded the VSPAC Competition Division. Since then, she has been the main director of the VSPAC Dance Competition Companies.

Despina has become an extremely sought out teacher and choreographer in New York. She is credited with a sagacious and cognizant eye for intuitive talented dancers. She has a strong conceptual vision that rises through artistic purity and a passion toward artistic excellence. She has confidence in her observation that integrating accomplished performers of different techniques into a work sparks fire. Many of her students have moved on to professional careers in dance. Her students have gone on to dance for Disney, Broadway, music videos, film, School of American Ballet, DeMa Dance Company, New York City Ballet, Miami City Ballet, American Ballet Theatre Jackie Onassis School, Radio City Christmas Show, NYU Tisch School of the Arts, Boston Conservatory, Marymount Manhattan College, Dance Theatre of Harlem, LaGuardia High School of the Performing Arts, Limon Dance Company, Radio City Rockettes Program, Ballet Hispanico, Ailey II, Joffrey Ballet, Suzanne Farrell Ballet, Westchester Knick's City Dancers and more. Despina has won numerous awards nationwide for her teaching and choreography including several national titles as well as "Teacher of the Year" for several consecutive years, and "Most Innovative Choreographer" at Kids Artistic Revue Nationals.

In 2009 Despina, along with her sister, Matina, founded a professional contemporary dance company named the DeMa Dance Company. She has brought in choreographers Sonya Tayeh, Tyce DiOrio, Tokyo and Yesid Lopez. Additionally DeMa Dance Company possesses a cadre of notable company members including Billy Bell from Fox's hit TV show "So You Think You Can Dance".

In addition to performing and choreographing, Despina has appeared on numerous covers of Body Wrappers Dancewear catalogues as their featured dance model. She has also appeared in a Nike print advertisement. Her students have also had the experience of appearing in several Body Wrappers Dancewear catalogues. Furthermore, Despina has assisted the resident Body Wrappers choreographer for various catalogue photo shoots.





# The Vicky Simegiatos Dance Company

The Vicky Simegiatos Dance Company is a non-profit 501(c)(3) organization whose sole purpose is to provide cultural enrichment for the Brooklyn community. We have established, through auditions, a Scholarship Program for talented young students who receive dance training, free of charge, and participate in our professional productions.

We believe that music and dance are necessary elements for a healthy and fulfilled existence. We are undertaking a unique and ambitious project every time we set out to do *The Nutcracker*. We are giving our young dancers the very rare opportunity to participate in a full length ballet on a concert stage with a live audience, with professional dancers and international ballet stars. It is an experience that will stay with them for the rest of their lives. It brings them the great reward of having achieved a lofty goal, having learned poise before an audience, having grasped the mathematical and spatial concepts required to learn choreography and take direction, and having applied themselves with the commitment to perfecting their craft. No matter where life takes them from here, the accomplishment of having danced in this ballet will be a powerful reference for them to call upon.

When you support our productions and our Company, you give us and our children the opportunity to experience the art

of dance through professional performances, and you give our neighbors the opportunity to experience a professional ballet production right in their own community. By offering the convenience of quality productions throughout New York City at reasonable cost, we hope to foster the appreciation of the arts in the community.

If you have not already done so, please be sure to place your name and address on our mailing list so that you can receive notice of our future productions.

Many thanks to our Founder and Artistic Director, Vicky Simegiatos. When it seems like we are doing the impossible, she gives us the motivation we need to go right through to the finale. And thanks to Matina Simegiatos for her talent and beauty, which inspires us all.

Finally, our deep appreciation to you, our audience, for your support and enthusiasm!

# The New York Times

## Review: E Pluribus ‘Nutcracker,’ as a British Critic Signs Off

By Alastair Macaulay  
Dec. 24, 2018

Researchers have found that over half the world’s “Nutcracker” productions take place in the United States. What matters, though, is that a high proportion of American “Nutcrackers” are good. I’ve seen many European versions of the ballet — British and Russian included — and remember the early onset of “Nutcracker” fatigue. Here, however, I’ve found myself hungry to keep seeking more productions and to revisit the best ones. Nutcrackering became for me — a British dance critic working in New York since 2007 — a happy way to discover America.

On Sunday, as my last task as the chief dance critic of The New York Times, I chose to take the ferry to Staten Island to see the Vicky Simegiatos Dance Company perform the ballet at the St. George Theater. This was at least my 35th American production in 12 years; both the theater and the production justified the trip.

The St. George is a marvel too little known outside Staten Island. The 2,800-seat theater, built in 1929, was intended as a home for vaudeville and cinema to vie with those across the water on Broadway. After coming close to demolition at the start of this century, it has been lovingly restored. The foyers and balconies are fabulously ornate. Auditorium, front-of-house areas and even restrooms are spectacular.



Teresa Reichlen and Ask la Cour of New York City Ballet, epitomizing the high standards to which all dancers aspire, were the guest artists on Staten Island.





Alisa Zakovics, as Clara in a scene from “The Nutcracker,” performed by the Vicky Simegiatos Dance Company at the St. George Theater on Staten Island.

Kim Max Photography

The Simegiatos company, founded in the early 1980s and based in Brooklyn, is something of a family industry. It’s a matriarchal organization: Vicky, the president, artistic director, and main “Nutcracker” choreographer, is assisted by her daughters, Matina (first vice president, ballet mistress, and co-choreographer of “The Nutcracker”) and Despina (second vice president). Matina and her husband, Voytek Sporek, play Frau and Dr. Silberhaus, the parents — often named Stalhbbaum in other productions — of Clara and Franz.

On paper, this all might sound parochial. Onstage, the levels of technique and theatrical projection are remarkably high; and there are dozens of adorable and well-drilled children. At one point in the Battle of Mice and Toy Soldiers, 12 truly tiny child-mice crawled on all fours, very precisely, across the stage, unable to hide their complete delight at contributing to the show. (This will remain one of my favorite “Nutcracker” memories.)

Act 2 started with 12 equally tiny angels — some of them the same performers from the mouse scene — now upright but no less blissful, through whom six larger cherubs danced in bigger steps. These children were already good professionals: Later in Act 2, when two child Gumdrops lost their headdresses (one also lost a shoe), they handled the situation adeptly, kicking or throwing the items out of view as quickly as possible. The child performer Alisa Zakovics was an exceptional Clara: a lovably innocent character with astonishingly proficient dancing.

Like so many “Nutcracker” productions, the Simegiatos version is performed for just one weekend, but surely is the result of months of industrious rehearsal. It has charming scenery and good costumes, but its Tchaikovsky music is taped, with long pauses between numbers. I found myself going along with all its directorial decisions but two: Patricia Casola, a woman in male attire, made a schoolmasterly Herr Drosselmeyer without fantasy, while the prolonged silence before the Waltz of the Flowers gave cause for alarm.

The staging, among other virtues, showcases the company's many admirable young adult dancers. The guest Sugar Plum couple, Teresa Reichlen and Ask la Cour from New York City Ballet, were in excellent form, dancing the pas de deux, choreographed by George Balanchine. Though Ms. Reichlen and Mr. la Cour epitomized the high standards to which all dancers aspire, the Simegiatos dancers were not seriously outshone. Beautiful arms (firmly sculptural) and strong pointework were widespread. Three impressive young ballerina technicians took the roles of Spanish Chocolate, Arabian Coffee and Dewdrop.

Few "Nutcrackers" tell the same story or even use quite the same score. (For connoisseurs, this is part of the fun: Which music will we hear next?) I enjoyed the overture being used to show us the magician Drosselmeyer at work on his four dolls. As it concluded, when he sprinkled silver dust, they came to life and danced offstage.

So, yes, another good American "Nutcracker." I come from the land where Richard Buckle once wrote, "Well, we are one more 'Nutcracker' nearer death." What is it about "The Nutcracker" that suits the United States? The ballet's love of hospitality, its innocence, travel adventure and transformations, its positive, outgoing energy and its cornucopia of stylistic diversity are all right for this country (which Tchaikovsky visited, enjoying immense success, between composing the two acts).

I have seen, but without pleasure, Realms of Sweets that are fenced or walled enclosures. The décor for the Colorado Ballet production, if memory serves, is the opposite: a spreading landscape, with islands and meadows and mountains all made of confectionery, as endearing as sweet. Just now it's particularly good to see a Realm of Sweets that admits characters from many nations. On the way back from Staten Island, the Statue of Liberty seemed a perfect part of a "Nutcracker" day. Like the Sugar Plum Fairy, she welcomes strangers and embraces diversity.



Sophia Jikia in "The Nutcracker."

Kim Max Photography

## About the Vicky Simegiatos Dance Company

The Vicky Simegiatos Dance Company is a non-profit 501(c)(3) organization whose sole purpose is to provide cultural enrichment for the Brooklyn community. The company was established in 1982 by its founder Vicky Simegiatos. Throughout its history, Ms. Simegiatos has given a home to the company at the Vicky Simegiatos Performing Arts Center free of charge. She has also volunteered her teaching and choreography services free of charge. Under her direction, the company has brought professional productions to theatres, schools and universities throughout the tri-state area. She also conducts Dance Appreciation Programs and Workshops which have been presented in public and private schools throughout Brooklyn, free of charge.

The company's sponsors include BACA (Brooklyn Cultural Arts Association), New York State Council of the Arts, the New York Life Foundation, and Body Wrappers.

The company has established, through auditions, a Scholarship Program for talented young students who receive dance training free of charge, and participate in their professional productions. The company believes that music and dance are necessary elements for a healthy and fulfilled existence. They are undertaking a unique and ambitious project





every time that they set out to prepare their professional productions, such as the Nutcracker, Cinderella, Coppelia, the Wizard Of Oz, just to name a few. They are giving their young dancers the rare opportunity to participate in a full length ballet on a concert stage with professional dancers, choreographers and directors, in front of a live audience. It is an experience that will stay with them for the rest of their lives. It brings them the great reward of having achieved a lofty goal, having learned poise before an audience, having grasped the mathematical and spatial concepts required to learn choreography and take direction, and having applied themselves with the commitment to perfecting their craft. No matter where life takes them from there, the accomplishment of having danced in these ballets will be a powerful reference for them to call upon.

When you support their productions and their Company, you give them and their children the opportunity to experience the art of dance through professional performances, and you give their neighbors the opportunity to experience a professional ballet production right in their own community. By offering the convenience of quality productions in Brooklyn at reasonable cost, they hope to foster the appreciation of the arts within the community.



## About the Scholarship Program

The Vicky Simegiatos Dance Company is a non-profit organization whose sole purpose is to enrich the cultural education of the Brooklyn community. They have established, through auditions, a Scholarship Program for talented young students who receive dance training free of charge, and participate in their professional productions. Throughout the history of the company, thousands of children from the community have been trained in this program. Many have gone on to become dance teachers themselves and some have gone on to enjoy professional careers in the dance world.

Students placed in this program receive the privilege of studying ballet and performance under master teachers and guest artists from elite dance companies. Recently they have had the opportunity to share the stage with New York City Ballet principal dancers Rebecca Krohn and Jared Angle in a professional production of *The Nutcracker*, a full length classical ballet. In previous years Jenifer Ringer, Tyler Angle, Maria Kowroski, Charles Askegard, Rebecca Krohn and Megan Fairchild have appeared on stage with the company.

Students have received training for partnering by New York City Ballet principal Charles Askegard. They have taken master classes with Elizabeth Walker, a member of New York City Ballet's corps de ballet and a faculty member at the company's prestigious



School of American Ballet. Students have been given the continuing opportunity to work with choreographer Yesid Lopez of Ballet Hispanico. They were also invited to observe as a brand new dance was being created by Sonya Tayeh, famed choreographer from Fox's hit TV series So You Think You Can Dance.

The Scholarship Program is directed by Matina Simegiatos. Ms. Simegiatos is a gifted dancer and choreographer as well as a patient, poised and much loved teacher. Her varied background features years spent as a student at The School of American Ballet and a dancer in productions with New York City Ballet. She has also appeared on Broadway in featured roles. In 2010 she had an original song, Smoke, in the Billboard Top Five.

Under her inspiration, students learn the high standards, discipline and artistry necessary to progress as ballet dancers. Because of her belief in them, their technique and interpretative skills develop quickly. Ms. Simegiatos trains her students to dance her intricate and kaleidoscopic choreography, preparing them to perform with the Vicky Simegiatos Dance Company.

Their Scholarship Program offers everything for the serious dancer with the desire, dedication and determination required to succeed in a career.





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PERFORMING ARTS CENTER

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