Great ballet for a great city

Pepper Pike couple central to return of Cleveland Ballet in Playhouse Square

By JULIE HULLETT

Michael Krasnyansky and Gladisa Guadalupe are making an impact on the arts scene in Northeast Ohio by adding a missing component — ballet. The new Cleveland Ballet is growing quickly in the dust of two ballet companies that closed their doors.

The Cleveland Ballet, the resident dance company at Playhouse Square, has 29 dancers from 11 countries and territories, including Belgium, Brazil, Colombia, France, Italy, Japan, Korea, Mexico, Puerto Rico, Taiwan and the United States. The dancers are mostly in their 20s, although the company recently hired a 16-year-old dancer.

The new company is the pride of Mr. Krasnyansky, 63, and Ms. Guadalupe, 56, who are married and reside in Pepper Pike. He is the president and CEO of the Cleveland Ballet, while she is the artistic director. In addition to the professional company, Cleveland Ballet has a trainee program, the School of Cleveland Ballet, and a youth ballet company.

“In keeping with our commitment to present ballet at a high quality level, the Cleveland Ballet once again brings together an incredible group of artists including the world’s greatest singers, musicians, lighting, set and costume designers and of course dancers,” Mr. Krasnyansky said.

Dancers flock to Cleveland

Dancers are drawn to Northeast Ohio, Ms. Guadalupe said, for the growing arts scene now that Playhouse Square’s theater district is the second largest in the U.S. behind Lincoln Center in New York City.

Three of the city’s major arts destinations include the Cleveland Museum of Art, the Museum of Contemporary Art and Severance Hall, home of the Cleveland Orchestra. Others include the Gordon Square Arts District at West 65th Street and Detroit Avenue and the Waterloo Arts District on Waterloo Road. In 2017, DanceCleveland launched the week-long Summer Dance Festival.

“[The dancers] have been impressed by the growth of the arts scene in Cleveland,” Ms. Guadalupe said. “Once they visit here, they fall in love with the city.”

Though it has a small annual budget of $1 million, Mr. Krasnyansky said the company is financially stable. He explained that some ballet companies spend a lot of money on set designs and costumes, while Cleveland Ballet focuses on choreography. For example, Mr. Krasnyansky said that one company might spend $1 million or $2 million producing the Nutcracker, while the Cleveland Ballet can produce the show with $100,000 focusing on intricate choreography and well-trained dancers.

“[The dancers] realize this company is financially stable and growing and has produced excellent productions,” he said.

Ms. Guadalupe’s ability to recognize talent has been part of the reason for the company’s success so far, her husband said.

She has an eye for spotting unrealized potential, he said. “She knows that in several months of training, that dancer can be a great dancer. She proved with many dancers that she can find the talent that others don’t see.”

Ms. Guadalupe added that the facility and training environment is beneficial to the dancers. Although the Cleveland Ballet is the resident company at Playhouse Square, their studio is located on Miles Road in Bedford Heights. The space has three studios and a fourth one is under construction. According to Ms. Guadalupe, she does not foster a competitive environment within the company and insists that everyone has talent that he or she deserves to show.

“We aren’t in a fancy facility, but we create the environment,” Mr. Krasnyansky said.
“We’re like a family.”

The Cleveland Ballet also partners with University Hospitals Sports Medicine to offer comprehensive care to their dancers. Mr. Krasnyansky and Ms. Guadalupe said that they are working on a program with their healthcare provider to offer physical, mental and emotional health services to the dancers.

In addition, the Cleveland Ballet is unique because it includes live music in the performances. Other ballet companies often use recorded music only, they said, but this company likes to include musicians on stage, such as a guitarist or a singer.

“It’s easier to have an orchestra or recorded music, but it’s not easy to combine them,” Mr. Krasnyansky said.

**History of Cleveland Ballet**

This isn’t the first time that a ballet company has sprung up in Cleveland. The first Cleveland Ballet was also known as the Popeloff Ballet, after its creator, Russian dancer Sergei Popeloff. It lasted from 1935 to 1942 and became inactive as the U.S. became more involved in World War II.

The Cleveland Ballet was re-incorporated by Dennis Nahat and Ian Horvath in 1972, and a co-venture with a second base in San Jose, California was established in 1986. The company stayed in Cleveland until 2000, when it moved all operations to San Jose. The ballet later closed in San Jose in 2016.

In 2000, Ms. Guadalupe founded the Cleveland School of Dance, later renamed the School of Cleveland Ballet, and in 2014, the couple founded the current Cleveland Ballet. The company offers a mix of classical and contemporary performances and re-introduced the regular holiday performances of the Nutcracker.

The Cleveland Ballet is entering its fifth season, and the 2019 performances include Carmen on Oct. 18-19, the Nutcracker, Dec. 5-15 and the Magic Flute May 8-9 in 2020.

“We agree on the simple statement that every great city has to have a great ballet company,” Mr. Krasnyansky said.

**Art meets business**

Ms. Guadalupe said that for an arts organization to work, the leaders must have a mix of art and business experience. Ms. Guadalupe is an alumna of the School of American Ballet, the training academy for the New York City Ballet.

She moved on to a professional career and became a principal dancer with ballet companies in Puerto Rico, Venezuela, San Jose and Cleveland. Ms. Guadalupe was a principal dancer for the second installment of the Cleveland Ballet.

Mr. Krasnyansky, whose university education was in physics, earned his Ph.D in environmental science in Moscow, Russia. He moved to the U.S. in 1989 and was employed at a chemical testing company and worked his way up to become the CEO. He is the president and CEO of MK Global Enterprises, LLC and has experience in the environmental, technology, health and oil and gas industries. He joined the School of Cleveland Ballet administration in 2011.

Day to day, Ms. Guadalupe has a training class for the dancers before rehearsals begin for upcoming performances. She is also the founder and artistic director of the school, which offers classes for dancers ages 2 through adults.

Mr. Krasnyansky reviews the financial reports cash flow to the board of directors and prepares contracts, grant applications and marketing materials.

**Outreach efforts**

There is also a community aspect to the Cleveland Ballet. Mr. Krasnyansky and Ms. Guadalupe said that they want to make ballet accessible to everyone.

“Originally, ballet was for the elites, a small group in France, Russia and Italy,” he said. “We strongly believe that it is not just for elites.”

Three years ago, the Cleveland Ballet started an outreach program to teach ballet to area children, according to Mr. Krasnyansky. Kids ages 8-15 from Bedford, Bedford Heights, Maple Heights and Warrensville Heights come to the studio twice a week to learn musical concepts and creative movements. At the end of the season, the children perform to show what they have learned. The Cleveland Ballet also works with Twinsburg youths ages 5-15 through a nonprofit called Made By Kids.

Mr. Krasnyansky said that the company has also donated tickets to Cleveland Ballet performances at Playhouse Square to allow families who cannot afford a ticket to immerse themselves in ballet. In addition, the School of Cleveland Ballet offered four full scholarships to students from the outreach program to join the school.

Ms. Guadalupe and Mr. Krasnyansky emphasized that their outreach efforts stem from their value for the arts.

“Art is the theater, you foster education and future arts,” she said. “There’s an intangible element to it. You go to a magnificent theater and watch a ballet company. You cannot build a generation of mediocrity.”

The couple continues to work on growing the ballet company and preparing for future performances, and thanked board chairman Dick Pogue for his brilliance and guidance.