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## Gala won't be tutu fancy

### Dance preview

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It's just one word. But changing it speaks volumes. Since 2002, the major dance event of Cincinnati's summers has been the Gala of International Ballet Stars. It's a rock 'em, sock 'em event - kind of like a Lollapalooza for dance. A dozen or so global dance luminaries jet into town, wow local audiences with a super-glitz duet or two at the Aronoff Center and then hop back on the plane.

But this year, producing artistic director Marvel Gentry Davis is making a change. Not in the show itself. She thinks the format is nearly perfect. It's the name she thinks needs tweaking.

"This year, we're calling it the Gala of International Dance Stars," says Davis.

Not a big deal, right? After all, even modern dancers often describe their works as "ballets." Besides, the nature of the pieces on this year's gala program aren't very different from what's appeared before; plenty of ballet - classical and contemporary - with a smattering of modern dance.

But in Davis' eyes, the name change was important. Essential, in fact.

"The change had to do with people's perception of what they were coming to see," says Davis, who is also president of ballet tech cincinnati, the group behind the presentation. "Lots of people hear the word 'ballet' and they think it's an exclusive sort of thing - something they won't understand."

But the fact is, ballet and modern dance have been moving closer for 20 or so years.

Take Alonzo King, artistic director of Alonzo King's Lines Ballet in San Francisco. Two of his pas de deux are included as part of this year's gala. They're ballet, to be sure. But you'd never mistake them for "Swan Lake."

King uses a movement vocabulary that melds the old and new. As a young man, he trained in ballet and modern dance. He performed with Dance Theatre of Harlem, a ballet company. But he also danced as part of modern companies led by Lucas Hoving and Donald McKayle.

And his choreography?

Stylistically, it's filled with all sorts of influences. As a result, it's delightfully hard to define. That makes some dance purists cringe. But most audiences are enthusiastic.

"That's why I definitely want people like Alonzo in the gala," says Davis. "He's a brilliant choreographer. But he creates ballets that audiences love. And they understand."

Davis originally intended to put off the change until next year. But her board seemed so enthusiastic, she opted to leap in right away.

And the result?

"Well, no one's complained so far," says Davis. "And interest seems very, very good, especially considering how the economy is. So maybe we made the right decision. I'll let you know how it works out next week."