

*Ice
Theatre
of
New York*®

CELEBRATING THE JOY
OF DANCING ON ICE

2024

BENEFIT GALA

HONORING OLYMPIANS

**MERYL DAVIS &
CHARLIE WHITE**

AND

**TANITH BELBIN WHITE
& BENJAMIN AGOSTO**

CHOREOGRAPHY AWARD RECIPIENT

SANDRA BEZIC

ALUMNI AWARD RECIPIENT

JUDY BLUMBERG



The Kasputys Family
Congratulates
Meryl Davis & Charlie White
Tanith Belbin & Ben Agosto



You forever transformed
the sport of US Ice Dancing.

With gratitude for your
inspiring performances!

**Joe Kasputys and
Vicki Van Mater**

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CELEBRATING THE JOY
OF DANCING ON ICE

WELCOME TO OUR 39TH "IT CONTINUES TO TAKE A VILLAGE" BENEFIT GALA

I so warmly welcome you here with us tonight to celebrate **Meryl Davis & Charlie White, Tanith Belbin White & Benjamin Agosto, Sandra Bezic and Judy Blumberg...** What a great village of excellence within the worlds of ice dance, choreography, and coaching!

With your continued help, Ice Theatre of New York® has and will maintain the important work that we do: commissioning choreographers and performance artists to create new works for the company, nurturing emerging artists, and introducing New York City Public School students to the art and joy of skating. Your support encourages our exploration of what is possible within the realm of artistic ice dance.

The commitment to creating works that are significant not only for their beauty and artistic value but for their meaning in our ever-shifting world remains a focus for Ice Theatre of New York. This season, pieces such as "Dry Your Tears, Afrika," which highlighted the emergence of great Black figure skaters and was performed to very appreciative crowds throughout Black History Month; "Of Water and Ice," which speaks to climate change and imperative to protect our arctic ice; and "Neurocircle," which puts the neurodivergent lived experience into flight through the combined arts of dancing on ice and aerial movement all spoke to this mission.

Looking ahead, I invite you to join us at our weekly Edge Classes at Sky Rink, our City Skate Concert Series at Rockefeller Center, Bryant Park, Wollman Rink, and other outdoor seasonal rinks, as well as our educational outreach program, the "New Works and Young Artists Series," offered free to public school students across the city boroughs. In this program, the students learn about dance performance on ice and then joining the performers/teachers on the ice, they learn what might become a lifelong healthy activity... ice skating!

Skating...combines and surpasses the joys of flying and dancing: only in a certain type of a dream do we ever else attain a higher degree of the same ravishing experience of exultantly skimming the earth.

— Ernest Jones, Biographer of Freud

Thank you for helping create and sustain our Ice Theatre of New York dream and for joining us as we glide gracefully and boldly into our future choreographic innovations, collaborations, and outreach programming!

Warmest Wishes,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Maria North".



**CELEBRATING THE JOY
OF DANCING ON ICE**

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ABOUT THE COMPANY

Ice Theatre of New York® (ITNY) creates and advances dance on ice as an ensemble performing art and provides education and public performances to people of all ages. Founded by Moira North in 1984, ITNY created the first not-for-profit professional ice dance company in the United States and was the first to receive funding from the National Endowment for the Arts, the New York State Council on the Arts, and the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs.

ITNY achieves its public arts and education mission by:

- Commissioning and performing new pieces created by recognized and emerging dance and ice skating choreographers. The company has created exclusive works by choreographers as varied as well-known skating choreographers Elisa Angeli, Lorna Brown, and Joel Dear, modern dance choreographers Jacquelyn Buglisi, Elisa Monte, David Parsons, and Jody Sperling, performance artist Ann Carlson, McKnight Choreographer Fellow Deneane Richburg, and ballet great Edward Villella. We just completed our first commissioned work for the Tree Lighting at Bank of America Winter Village in Bryant Park choreographed by Broadway Dancer Kolton Krouse.
- Making performances accessible to diverse audiences and presenting dozens of free performances, featuring our current repertory throughout New York City.
- Offering arts education programs on ice dancing and figure skating for school-aged children in Brooklyn, Queens, Harlem, and Central Park, annually serving 1,000 NYC school students.
- Training company skaters and guest skating artists in our seasonal Master Edge Classes at Chelsea Piers Sky Rink and Bryant Park, as well as offering training programs for aspiring ice dance artists, including our Junior Ensemble.
- Collaborating with choreographers, producers, presenters, administrators, and advocates from the dance and skating worlds and beyond while exploring creatively exciting relationships with artists from theatre, music, and new media disciplines.

62 Chelsea Piers, Suite 308, New York, NY 10011

(212) 929-5811 | itny@icetheatre.org | icetheatre.org    



THE CITY OF NEW YORK
OFFICE OF THE MAYOR
NEW YORK, NY 10007

May 6, 2024

Dear Friends:

It gives me great pleasure to welcome everyone as the Ice Theatre of New York (ITNY) hosts its annual benefit gala and performance.

Founded in 1984, ITNY promotes dancing on ice as an ensemble performing art through its professional dance company, partnerships with choreographers, and public performances and classes for people of all ages. I am grateful for all it does to expand access to New York's dynamic athletic and cultural offerings. Tonight's event will raise vital funds for ITNY's New Works and Young Artists Series, an outreach program for public school children, as well as for its 2024-2025 season. I join with everyone gathered in applauding this outstanding organization for its commitment to helping diverse New Yorkers experience the artistry, joys, and fitness benefits of ice dancing.

On behalf of the City of New York, congratulations to this year's distinguished honorees. Please accept my best wishes for an inspiring evening and continued success.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Eric Adams".

Eric Adams
Mayor





OFFICE OF THE
**MANHATTAN
BOROUGH PRESIDENT**

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Mark Levine, Borough President



May 6, 2024

Dear Friends,

I'm pleased to join you in celebrating Ice Theatre of New York's 2024 Benefit Gala and Performance.

For four decades, ITNY has been cultivating and showcasing groundbreaking ice dancing. You have changed the face of figure skating, pushing the boundaries of movement and increasing diversity across the discipline. I'm especially grateful for ITNY's many free performances across the city and your outreach program for at-risk public school students.

Congratulations to tonight's honorees, Meryl Davis, Charlie White, Tanith Belbin-White, and Ben Agosto. I would also like to congratulate Sandra Bezic on receiving the Choreography Award and Judy Blumberg on receiving the Alumni Award.

On behalf of the Borough of Manhattan, I wish you another year of success.

Sincerely,

Mark Levine
Manhattan Borough President



ERIK BOTTCHER
COUNCIL MEMBER

THIRD COUNCIL DISTRICT OF
THE CITY OF NEW YORK
224 WEST 30TH STREET, #1206
NEW YORK, NY 10001

TELEPHONE
(212) 564-7757

May 6, 2024

Ice Theatre of New York, Inc.
62 Chelsea Piers #308
New York, NY 10011

Dear Friends,

I am honored to have the opportunity to offer my congratulations on the Ice Theatre's 2024 Benefit Gala and Performance. In particular, I extend my warmest congratulations to Meryl Davis and Charlie White, extraordinary ice artists who are the first American dancers to win the Ice Dance World Championships and the Olympics.

I am also pleased to celebrate Tanith Belbin-White and Ben Agosto on becoming the first ever U. S. ice dancing team to win a silver medal at the Winter Olympic Games. In addition, I want to recognize the recipient of the ITNY Choreography Award, Canadian Champion, Choreographer and TV Commentator Sandra Beziec and the recipient of the ITNY Alumni Award, former American competitive ice dancer and Ensemble Director, Judy Blumberg.

I am especially thrilled to join ITNY for its 2024 Benefit Gala and Performance as we all come together to celebrate ITNY's continued dedication to advancing dance on ice, setting a national standard for ice dance companies.

Congratulations again to all the awardees for their accomplishments, and congratulations to ITNY and Moira North on another successful year. Here's to wishing for your continued success in the years ahead and a wonderful time for everyone here tonight.

Sincerely,

ERIK BOTTCHER
Council Member
District 3

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April 19, 2024

Dear Friends,

I write to honor four distinguished individuals who have excelled at the highest levels of their craft — Olympians Meryl Davis, Charlie White, Tanith Belbin White, and Ben Agosto. Our city has watched, cheered, and reveled in their feats as they have left an indelible imprint on the world of figure skating, and I join all New Yorkers in congratulating them on receiving this honor today.

Skilled competitors, graceful skaters, and creative performers, Meryl, Charlie, Tanith, and Ben have separated themselves on the ice, captivating judges and audiences alike around the world. And while this talented cohort of skaters are unquestionably among the most powerful individuals to touch the ice, that is only the beginning of their impact on the world of ice dancing. Through mentorship, coaching, and choreography training, these individuals continue to inspire the next generation of skaters to pursue their dreams.

I commend Meryl, Charlie, Tanith, and Ben for their many achievements and genuine efforts to grow the world of figure skating. I cannot think of more deserving recipients of this honor from Ice Theatre of New York. Here's to the next Meryl, the next Charlie, the next Tanith, and the next Ben taking the ice world by storm!

Sincerely,

Council Member Shaun Abreu
New York City Council, District 7



CONGRATULATIONS TO THE 2024 ITNY HONOREES

TANITH BELBIN WHITE & BEN AGOSTO

MERYL DAVIS & CHARLIE WHITE

CONGRATULATIONS TO ALL THE HONOREES,
AND TO THE ICE THEATRE OF NEW YORK!

X VERA

VERAWANG

CONGRATULATIONS
MERYL, CHARLIE, TANITH AND BEN



THANK YOU FOR ALL THE MEMORIES

LISA RENDA



Sparking Excellence

By Philip Hersh

Not long after Ben Agosto switched from singles skating to ice dance at age 10, he faced up to the reality that winning medals on a global stage might be impossible for a U.S. ice dancer.

Why wouldn't he think that way, given the evidence? After all, one of his first coaches, Susie Wynne, had retired from competition after finishing fourth at the 1990 World Championships with Joe Druar, having decided, as she puts it, "We had topped out. That was the best we could do."

That fourth place would, in fact, be the best finish for a U.S. team at worlds over nearly two decades since Judy Blumberg and Michael Seibert won their third straight world bronze in 1985, a span in which Soviet and Russian teams won 15 of 18 world titles, four of five Olympic titles and nine of 15 Olympic medals.

Until Agosto and Tanith Belbin ended that drought in 2005.

After partnering with Belbin and moving to Detroit in 1998, Agosto became perplexed about why the two obviously talented ice dance teams with whom they would share training ice, Elizabeth Punsalan - Jerod Swallow and Naomi Lang - Peter Tchernyshev (both five-time U.S. champions), never placed higher than sixth on a global podium.

Fortunately, the apparently Sisyphean (or quixotic?) quest to reach such a

podium did not discourage either Belbin, a native Canadian, or Agosto, a native Chicagoan.

"In hindsight, I've wondered how we managed dealing with that reality," Belbin said. "But in the moment, it never occurred to us. It was always just a matter of keep working and see how far you can go. In some ways, that benefitted us, because there were no expectations."

That still was the case as Belbin and Agosto prepared for the 2005 World Championships in Moscow. "I thought it would be great if we finished in the top five," Agosto said.

Ice dance for years had been a discipline where movement in the standings was glacial. Belbin and Agosto had finished fifth in 2004, so few would have dared foresee what happened in 2005: they won the silver medal, matching the best world finish ever by a U.S. team, which had happened most recently in 1975.

"I was shocked," Agosto said.

What has happened since is even more shocking for a country whose ice dance results once had suggested the athletes had two left feet.

When Madison Chock and Evan Bates won their second straight world title in Montreal this March, it was the 17th time at least one U.S. ice dance team had won a medal in the last 19 world meets.

"It seems surreal," Belbin said.

Belbin and Agosto started those two decades of winning not only at worlds but at the Olympics. A Winter Games silver in 2006 made them the second U.S. team to win an Olympic dance medal, following Colleen O'Connor and Jim Millns in 1976.

U.S. dancers now have won medals in five straight Olympics.

Meryl Davis and Charlie White, longtime training mates of Belbin and Agosto, won two of those medals, silver in 2010 and first-ever U.S. Olympic dance gold in 2014. That was the culmination of a 17-year partnership in which they also were the first to win gold at worlds, doing it in 2011 and again in 2013.

At its May 6 annual gala, the Ice Theatre of New York is honoring both Belbin and Agosto and Davis and White "not only for their accomplishments as artistic Olympians and national champions but also as important role models in our 'icy' world," according to Moira North, ITNY founder and artistic director.

"In thinking about what this honor means," Davis said, "I found myself so grateful that it really gives me the chance to reflect on our competitive career as well as all of the special moments that I don't always get to remember on a daily basis - and to think about all of the people who were part of our journey that I don't get to see or speak with frequently.

"So many of the people who are

IMG

Congratulations to Olympic Legends

Meryl Davis & Charlie White

and

Tanith Belbin White & Ben Agosto

From your friends at IMG



**Meryl, Charlie,
Tanith & Ben,
THANK YOU** for all
you've done to
empower our girls to
skate to success!

Congratulations!





involved with Ice Theatre of New York were a part of our journey. Being honored alongside Judy Blumberg (Alumni Award) and Sandra Bezic (Choreography Award), and, of course, alongside Tanith and Ben, it almost feels like coming home. It's so special."

The impact of both teams is evident to their successors.

"I absolutely remember vividly when they (Belbin and Agosto) won that silver medal in 2005," Bates said after winning in Montreal. "It seems like that really was the catalyst for what has become a great two decades of U.S. ice dance.

"They inspired us so much. And then they were followed by Meryl and Charlie, who were our idols and role models when we trained in Michigan. The proximity to greatness is the most motivating thing in the world. They really blazed the trail."

It was a trail on which others already had posted signs of excellence, even if they fell short of medals.

"I would be remiss to not mention that we didn't start it," Belbin added. "We came to Detroit Skating Club, watched Liz and Jared finishing out their competitive career and then watched Naomi and Peter take a few more steps forward. So we were just following on that path."

When Belbin and Agosto won their Olympic medal in Turin, Italy, he said, "I

know for a fact it will not take another 30 years for the next U.S. medal."

"The success of Tanith and Ben had sparked a whole generation," said White, who married Belbin in 2015. "When they won their first (worlds medal), it was like a spark of amazement and excitement.

"It happened just as Meryl and I were about to step up to the senior level. It definitely created a sense of hope as an American ice dancer that if you worked your tail off, you would be rewarded."

Davis remembers watching the telecast of Belbin and Agosto at the 2006 Olympics and thinking, "You know, that could be us in four years."

"In seeing them on a daily basis, we realized what went into that moment," Davis said. "Seeing these two friends and role models on the TV winning their Olympic medal, it helped us to connect the dots and to understand that if that's the direction we want, we know what to do. The formula was literally laid out before us."

Belbin and Agosto finished their career with the Olympic silver followed by a fourth in 2010; four world medals (two silver, two bronze); and five U.S. titles. Their icebreaking international record owed to a number of factors, including some good timing.

"Every step of the way, it felt like

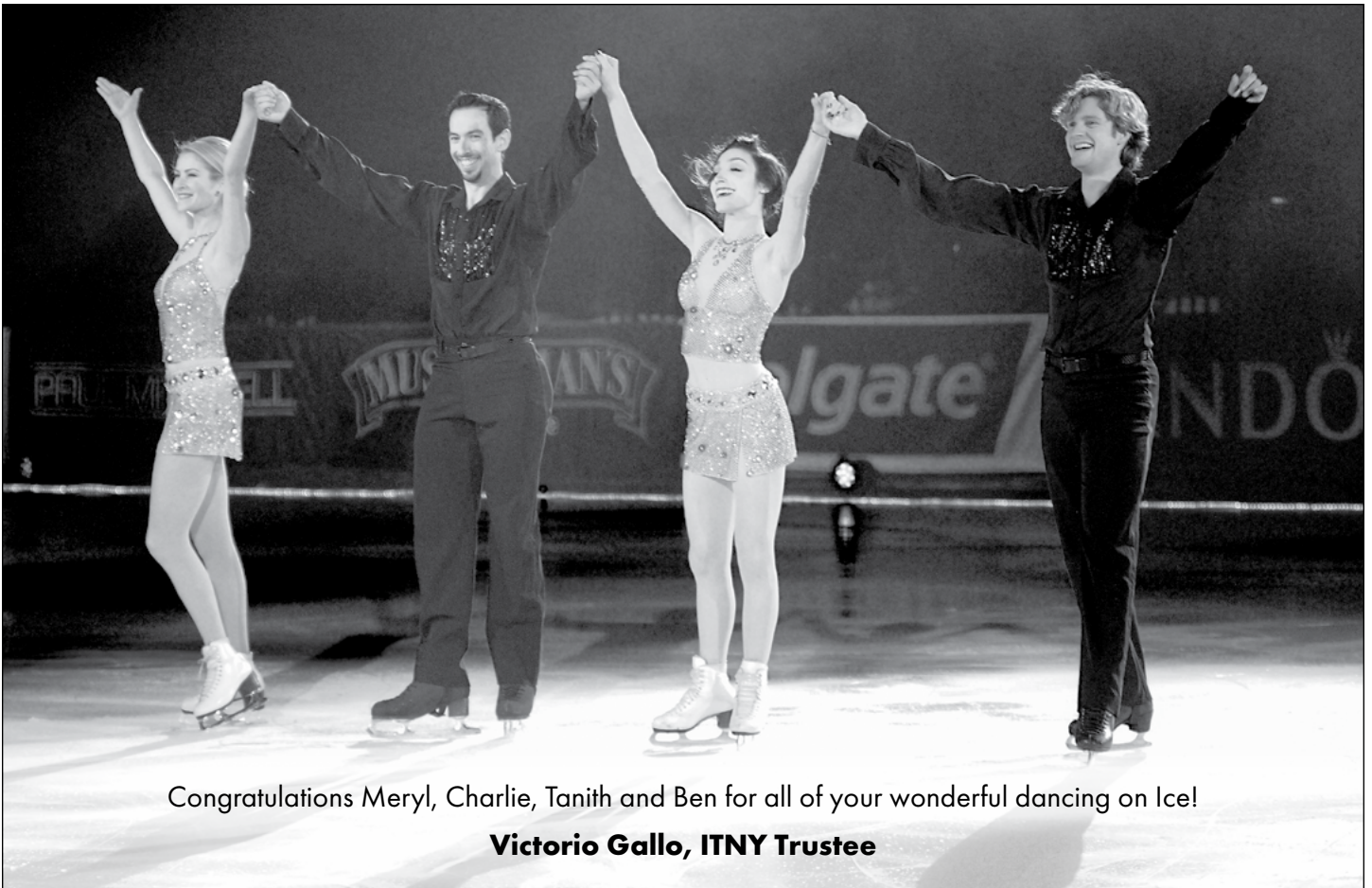
this bubble must be about to burst," Belbin said, laughing. "It was all very serendipitous."

Serendipity, 1: Belbin literally got U.S. citizenship at the 11th hour to make her eligible for the 2006 Olympics. That was in the peak phase of their career, before injuries slowed them down. Without someone opening a citizenship and immigration office on New Year's Eve 2005 to swear Belbin in as a U.S. citizen, their career would not include an Olympic medal.

Serendipity, 2: It was also their good fortune that the sport's new judging system went into place in the 2004 season and was first used at worlds in 2005 and at the Olympics in 2006.

"We felt the thrill of things changing and being a part of that," Belbin said. "It felt like the new system favored a lot of our strengths, like maximum energy and a lot of athleticism. We could actually use our enthusiasm to more effect technically, just to be able to move our feet quickly to pack in a lot of technical content - and be rewarded for that."

The International Judging System's highly mathematical approach to evaluating the most subjective discipline in figure skating eroded the time-honored stratification and (some of) the reputational judging of ice dance results.



Congratulations Meryl, Charlie, Tanith and Ben for all of your wonderful dancing on Ice!

Victorio Gallo, ITNY Trustee

The Skating Club of New York

is proud to salute

Ice Theatre of New York

and

Honorees

Meryl Davis & Charlie White

and

Tanith Belbin White & Ben Agosto



Choreography Award
Sandra Bezic

Alumni Award
SCNY member Judy Blumberg



The best example of that impact? Reigning Olympic champions Gabriella Papadakis and Guillaume Cizeron of France went from 13th at the 2014 worlds to first in 2015. And although the numbers are less striking, Davis and White went from sixth in the 2008 worlds and fourth in 2009 to Olympic silver in 2010 in Vancouver.

“Those U.S. teams before us had a giant castle door in front of them,” Agosto said. “They had been banging on that door for a long time and really softening it to the point where then Tanith and I were able to push in.

“The change of the judging system helped a lot. At that early point in IJS, everything was kind of thrown into not chaos but into a little bit of flux where the old ways were harder to continue. We really benefited from a situation where, you know, the marks could be the marks you deserved.”

Davis and White grew up under IJS. He feels its specificity – this many lifts worth this much, this many twizzles, this many step sequences – provided a template for young dancers to follow as they sought to grow their skating.

“It focused us and especially young dancers on training specific turns and lifts and having maybe a better understanding of, ‘How do we define this as a sport?’” White said. “It gave us some metrics, and that was new and kind of fun as a young person to be able to play with the numbers and see where we could improve ourselves.”

Doing the technical elements in ice dance well is one thing. Doing them with emotion, synchronicity of movement and

inventiveness is what separates “well” from exceptional. In the case of Davis and White, the length of a partnership that began when she was nine and he, eight, created the understanding to make the two kids from Michigan a cohesive pair as adults.

“Charlie and I grew up together, learned a great deal about life and who we were as people during our time together,” Davis had told me in answering a question about the impact of longevity. “For many, many years, we spent most of our hours of most of our days in each other’s space.

“After so much time, particularly in a creative, competitive and demanding environment, we learned to read one another quite naturally — mood, body language, little nuances in the tone of voice and emotional state. That deep understanding built over time bred a trust and comfort I found incredibly reassuring as we approached our Olympic moments, particularly in 2014.”

Their 17 years together led to a 2014 Olympic free dance so physically and mentally demanding it left them looking as if they had spent 17 years of energy on the four minutes of skating that brought them victory in Sochi over their brilliant Canadian rivals, Tessa Virtue and Scott Moir, the 2010 (and 2018) Olympic champions.

Their music was from Rimsky-Korsakov’s “Scheherazade,” a composition White had loved for years. He debated using it because compatriot Evan Lysacek had skated to it for his title-winning Olympic free skate in 2010.

“I was like, ‘There’s no way we’ll

be able to use it now that Evan winning with it was historic,’” White first thought before realizing he would be haunted by not using music that had become an ear worm for him.

The intensity of the “Scheherazade” sections coach Marina Zoueva chose for Davis and White suited perfectly the power and athleticism that had come to define their skating. The most striking feature of the way they performed it was a feeling for tempo, their skating changes of pace matching the shifts in the music’s speed. That is an artistic understanding White said they had not developed until 14 years into their partnership.

“One of my favorite things about our career was that we got to a point where we were able to use the same music that an American Olympic champion had used, and we were really able to make it our own,” White said. “The whole process, putting together the lifts, putting together the choreography, it all came together in a really natural way. And every time we performed it, I felt the music, and I felt my connection to Meryl.”

Nine years earlier in Moscow, Belbin and Agosto had made it, “game on,” for U.S. ice dancers.

And then here came Davis and White back in Russia, coached by Russian emigres to North America, skating to music by one of Russia’s so-called “Mighty Five” composers, winning an event in which Russians once had the only game in town.

Philip Hersh, who has covered figure skating at every Winter Olympics since 1980, spent 31 years as the Olympic specialist of the Chicago Tribune.

Sandra,

I'm not sure you know how much of *YOU* was always out there on the ice with me skating. Whether it was Blue Danube, Malagueña, Queen, Juliet, or Bridge and so many in between...your vision, genius, passion, and subtle nuances were always my inspiration to try and perform.

A heartfelt thank you and congratulations on your well-deserved honor.

Love you XOXO
Kristi





SANDRA BEZIC

LOVING THE PROCESS

By Lynn Rutherford

As Sandra Bezic tells it, her groundbreaking choreography career is largely built on one word.

"I just said 'yes' to everything," she says, without a trace of regret.

"I started working just as skating was becoming so popular in North America. Living through that in the '80s and '90s, being around when the phone just never stopped ringing, I learned on the job, and one job would inform the next. I would take what I learned and apply it I love the process, I love to figure things out."

For "jobs" ranging from countless programs for top skaters, to film and TV productions including *Carmen on Ice* and *Battle of the Blades*, to touring productions, Ice Theatre of New York honors Bezic with its 2024 Choreography Award.

"Sandra is one of the most intelligent, prolific and successful ice choreographers of our time," says ITNY founder Moira North. "We are so honored to bestow this award."

The Toronto native's skating journey began in the 1960s, when she and older brother Val formed a pair team. The youngsters trained at the famed Cricket Club alongside the theatrical and thrilling Toller Cranston, sharing the six-time Canadian men's champion's coach, Ellen Burka.

Burka, a tough taskmaster who emphasized artistry and beauty along with technique, instilled the importance of selecting meaningful and personal music.

"We would go to her house and she would

show us the album and tell us about the composer and what the history was," Bezic told Canadian Press when Burka died at age 95 in 2016. "She made you understand and love the music before you started working with it, rather than just plopping it on our laps."

Elegant and musical, Sandra and Val won five Canadian pair titles (1970-1974) and placed in the world's top ten four times. After they retired from amateur competition, they performed as professionals for several years.

Bezic recalls *Romeo and Juliet on Ice*, a 1983 TV special starring Olympic champion Dorothy Hamill, as her first big choreography gig.

"The director, Robert Iscove, was a dance director, and he asked me to ice his vision," she says. "I was hired as an assistant, but my position grew as we worked. I learned so much from Rob, and so much about working for the camera. And that information I learned, and that perspective I learned, I then applied to my competitive programs."

Nowadays, when skaters and their coaches await marks in the kiss-and-cry, the skaters' choreographers are often seated alongside them. But prior to the 1980s, many skaters did not use choreographers, and if they did, they were often from the dance world. Creators of even the most memorable programs were mostly unknown to the public.

When Bezic began choreographing competitive routines, starting with four-time

Canadian pair champions Barbara Underhill and Paul Martini, she was acknowledged as an essential member of the team.

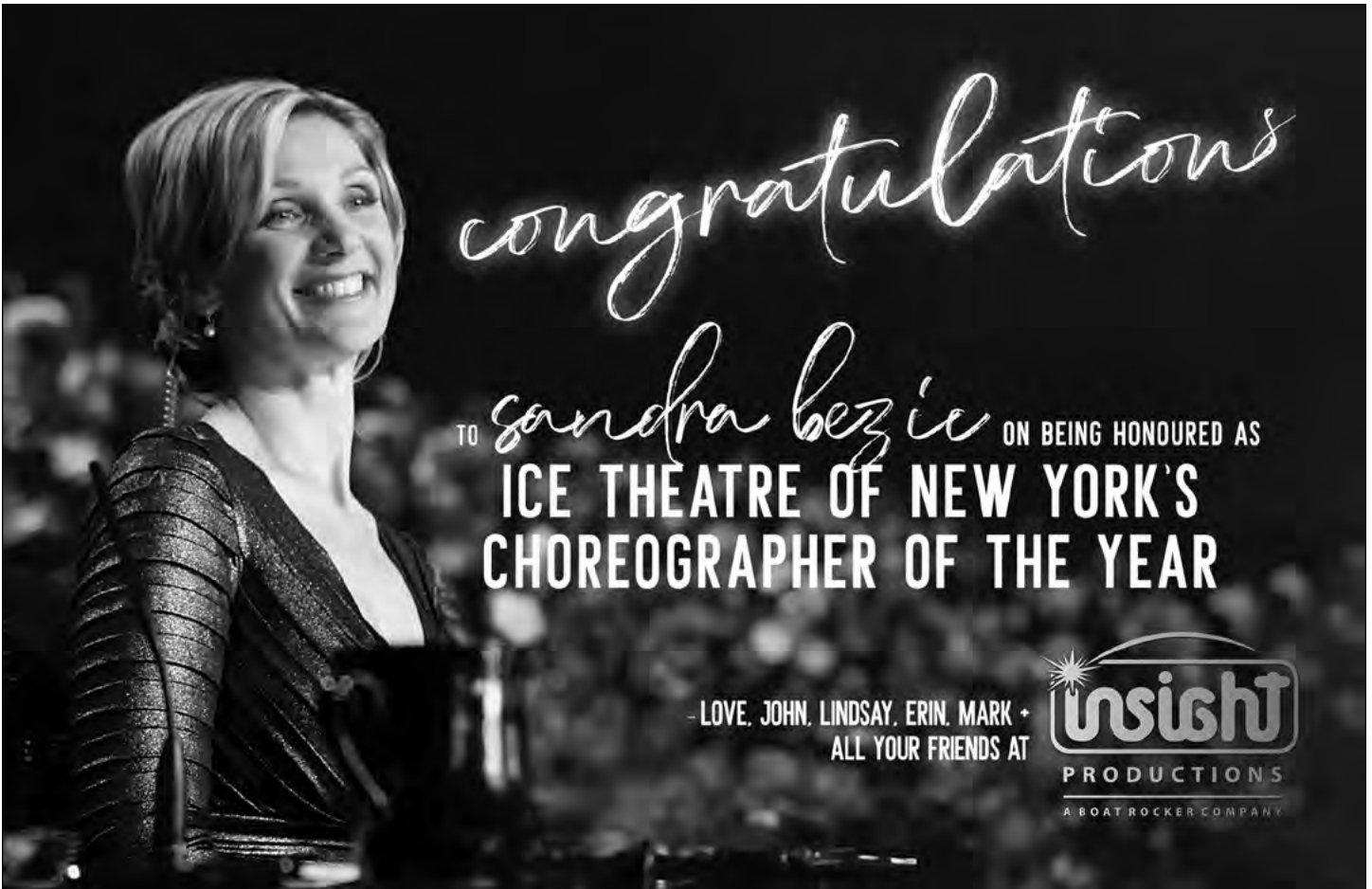
"I had only just started working, and I got a call from Louis Stong, and he asked me if I would coach Barb and Paul with him," she says. "This is before skaters had choreographers; in the competitive world, coaches did the choreography. It was perfect for me, because I was a pair skater and I was familiar with that world."

Bezic created the programs that helped Underhill and Martini win the 1984 world pair title. She went on to create many memorable programs for them during their professional career, adhering to Stong's directive to "go big or go home."

"I learned my craft with them," she says. "Barb and Paul had all the technical ability and all the tricks, but because they were so physically mismatched (due to a foot difference in height), it was a project to figure out what body lines looked good on them, and how they could relate to each other."

The young choreographer's phone continued to ring. In 1987, it was Linda Leaver, coach of Brian Boitano, on the line. Boitano had just been dethroned as world champion by Canadian Brian Orser, and he would be squaring off against Orser again at the 1988 Olympics in Calgary, Alberta.

That season, Boitano performed his free skate to a rather incongruous medley including "When the Saints Come Marching In," "Summertime" and "Jailhouse Rock." Bezic



congratulations

TO *sandra bezic* ON BEING HONOURED AS
**ICE THEATRE OF NEW YORK'S
CHOREOGRAPHER OF THE YEAR**

- LOVE, JOHN, LINDSAY, ERIN, MARK +
ALL YOUR FRIENDS AT



Thank you,

Meryl and Charlie,
Tanith and Ben for your
poetic performances.

Sandra for your immense
talent and vision.

Judy for bringing
ice dancing into the light.

Sarah Kawahara

CONGRATULATIONS SANDRA!!!
Love, JoJo



How blessed I have been to journey through my skating life with
2 such fabulous women
2 such fabulous skaters
2 such fabulous friends
Both ITNY honorees



recognized his underlying majesty and breathtaking power.

“His material may have been sort of typical of what was expected – you know, when judges and officials come in to assess a skater and say, ‘Oh, you need to smile more,’” she says. “He was trying to listen to all those pieces of advice, and I felt it was making him look small. He was something different. His technique was an art form in itself.”

Bezic’s programs, including Boitano’s free skate to music from the “Napoleon and Josephine” TV miniseries, helped lead him to Olympic gold by transforming him into a compelling, larger-than-life figure on the ice, a persona he would retain for the rest of his long career.

“I was so drawn to his idealism, his single mindedness, the purity of his desire to skate the performance of his life at the moment it counted most,” Bezic says. “I wanted to give him something as grand as he seemed, to me, to be.”

The phone rang more and more. The goal, always, was to hold a mirror up to a skater and have them recognize their unique beauty and strength.

For 1992 Olympic champion Kristi Yamaguchi, Bezic’s programs emphasized “her quiet power – I wanted to uncover that.” Tara Lipinski, just 15 when she won Olympic gold in 1998, was given routines that capitalized on her youthful exuberance: “She was so young and talented. And that was all it was. (The programs) were honest.”

Four-time world champion Kurt Browning created many of his famous professional routines, including his iconic “Singin’ in the Rain,” with Bezic: “There was a real challenge in that because he can be such a

chameleon.... I wanted to live up to his talent. TV specials gave us massive opportunity to play and to try different things.”

In the 2000s, as the 6.0 judging system gave way to the more regimented International Judging System (IJS), Bezic increasingly pivoted away from competitive choreography to other projects.

“My style is to peel back to find the essence of who I’m working with, instead of adding on and on,” she says. “And the rules today are sort of, the more you move around, and the more you do things, the more points you get.”

She served as a commentator for NBC for four Olympics (2002, 2006, 2010 and 2014). As choreographer, director and co-producer, she was an integral part of the “Stars on Ice” tour’s glory years, winning an Emmy for a TV production of SOI in 2003.

Battle of the Blades, a reality competition teaming figure skaters with hockey players to perform pair programs, debuted on CBC Television in 2009. It ran for four seasons and was briefly revived in 2019.

“That was an idea that was hatched in my kitchen,” Bezic says of the show. “It took us (including co-creator Kevin Albrecht) three years to get it on the air. I think all my experience in past productions was very helpful to make it happen, but of course, it’s the team, it’s never me alone.”

In 2023, she jumped headfirst into a truly quirky project, Canadian comic Carolyn Taylor’s *I Have Nothing*. The six-part documentary series, available on Bell Media’s streaming service Crave, follows Taylor as she interacts with figure skating champions and fulfills a childhood ambition to choreograph a pairs program to the Whitney

Houston hit. Bezic acts as her mentor.

“I’m a producer, and I make TV shows and that’s the world I’ve been in far more than competitive skating and choreography,” Bezic says. “I’m far more inclined to do something like Carolyn Taylor’s show than to work with a competitor. It’s just where my brain is right now.”

But then the phone rings, and exceptions are made. Last May, Bezic traveled to Hackensack, New Jersey to create a short program for Lindsay Thorngren, an 18-year-old U.S. competitor and world junior medalist.

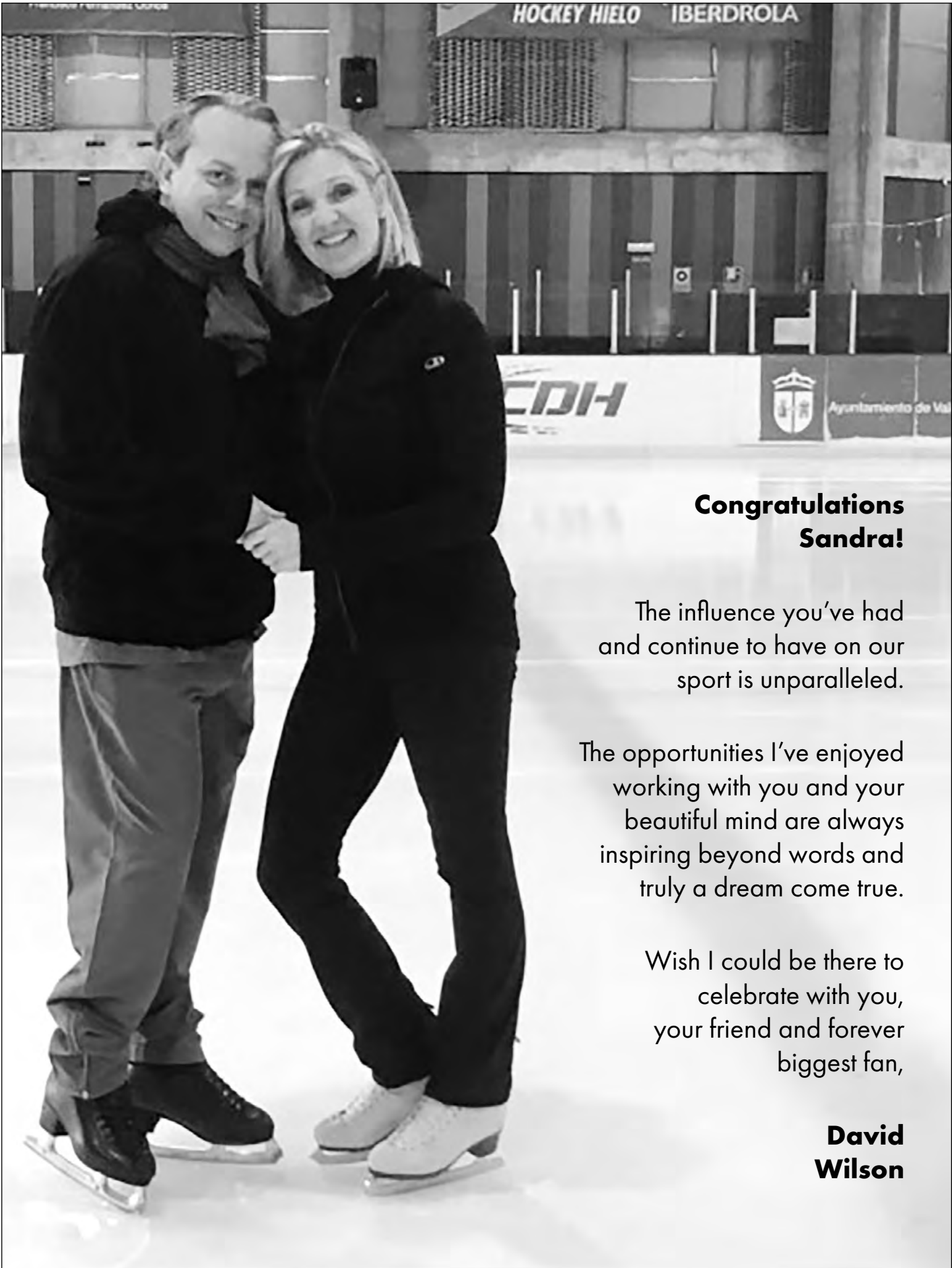
An introspective performer, Thorngren prefers to display emotion through subtle movements on the ice. Together, the two discussed possible music choices, much as Bezic did with her coach more than four decades ago. Bezic selected Michel Legrand’s “Windmills of Your Mind,” and Thorngren found Venus’ rendition of the classic.

“I told Lindsay, ‘There is nothing wrong with being quiet,’” Bezic says. “Quiet can run deep. I don’t believe in trying to change skaters. What I’ve always tried to do is to find a clue to the way they are most comfortable expressing themselves.”

“I feel like the music highlights my skating qualities and reflects my own thoughts,” Thorngren says. “By doing that, it helps me reach out to the audience, and helps the audience understand more about my program.”

The relationship continues. This spring, Bezic, along with David Wilson, created another program for Thorngren.

“There’s always a way to create something fresh,” Bezic says. “The unknown excites me, and I think that’s why I’ve lasted so long and had such a variety of experiences.”



**Congratulations
Sandra!**

The influence you've had
and continue to have on our
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The opportunities I've enjoyed
working with you and your
beautiful mind are always
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truly a dream come true.

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celebrate with you,
your friend and forever
biggest fan,

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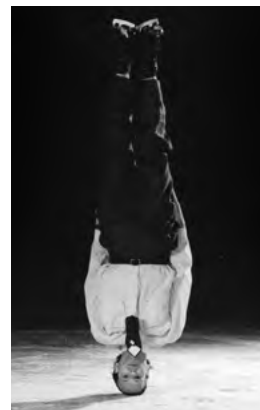
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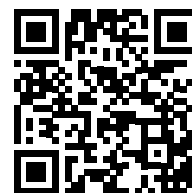


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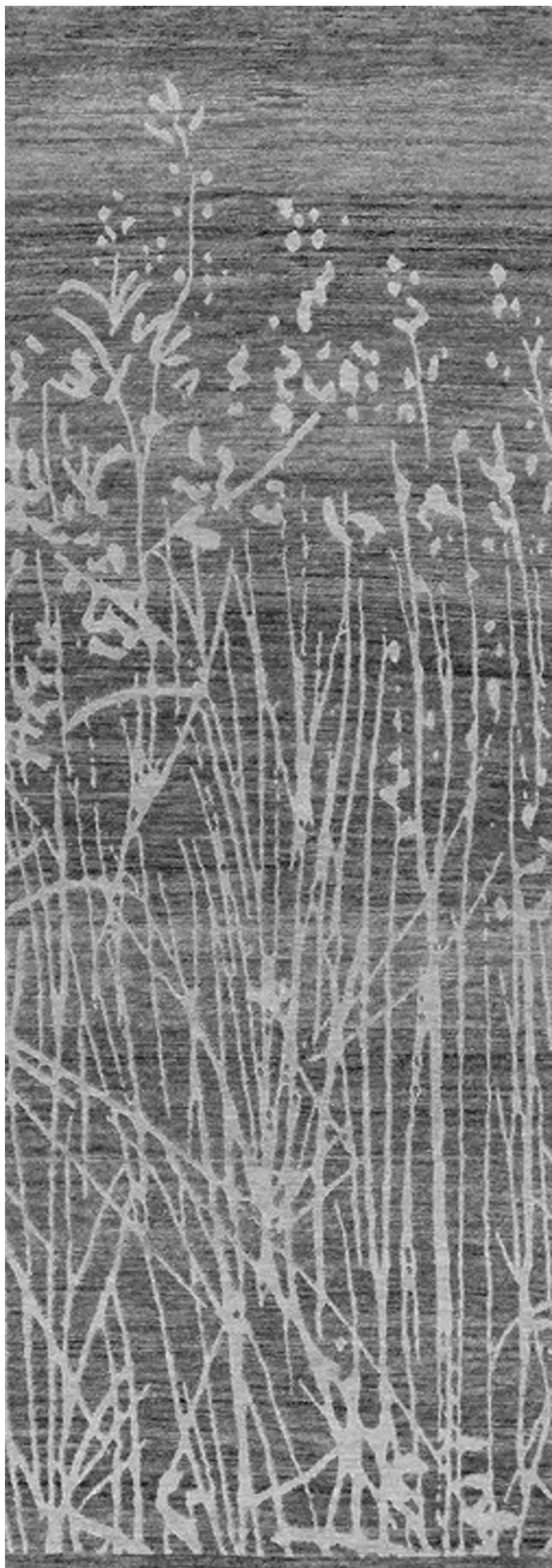
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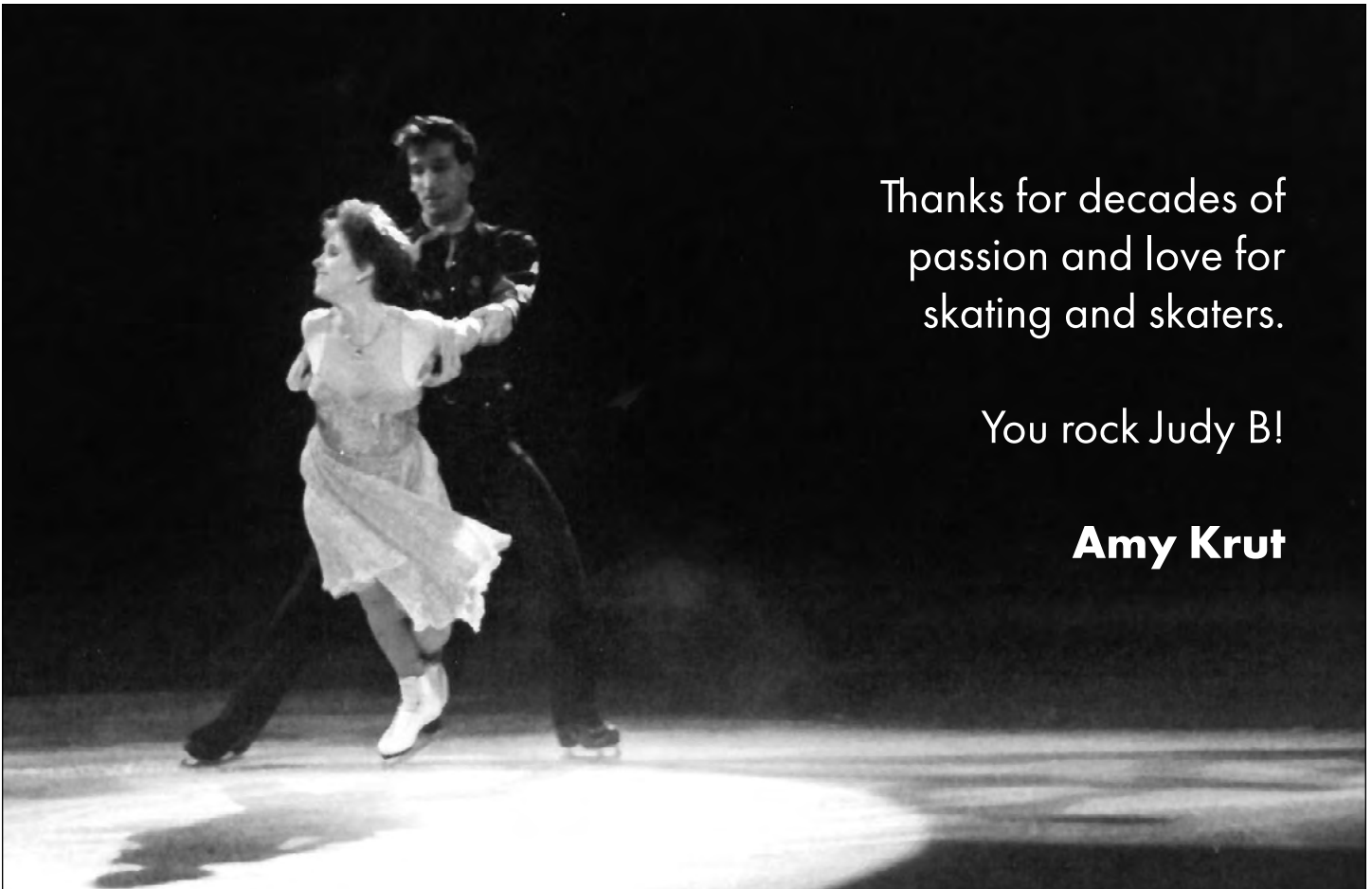


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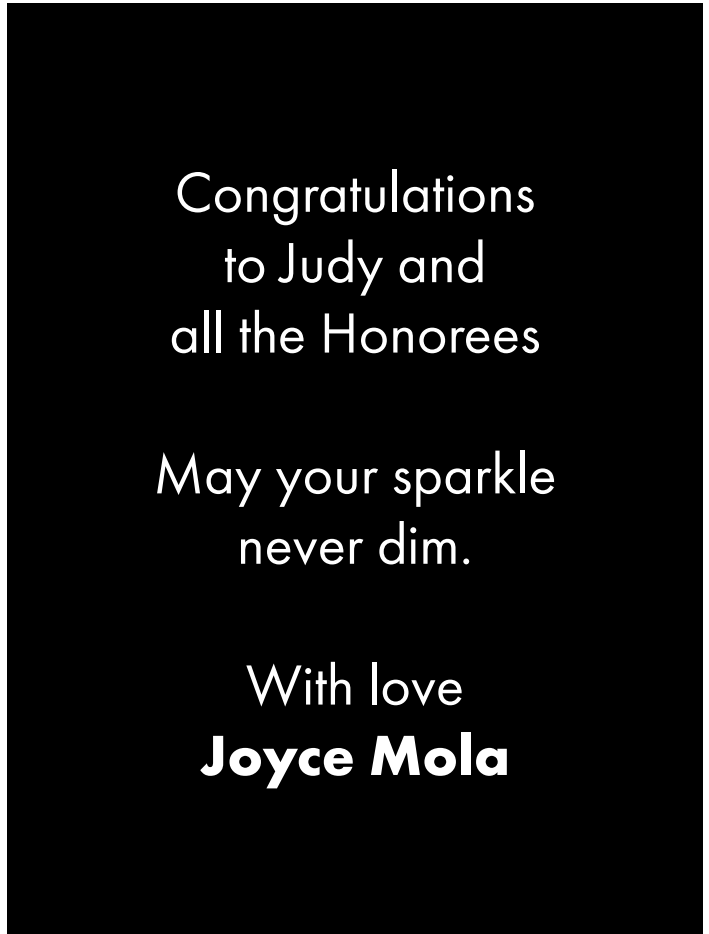
You rock Judy B!

Amy Krut



Congratulations, Judy!

With Love and Admiration,
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Congratulations
to Judy and
all the Honorees

May your sparkle
never dim.

With love
Joyce Mola

JUDY BLUMBERG

A LIFE OF ARTISTIC EXPLORATION

By Lois Elfman



Even as a competitive skater, alumni honoree Judy Blumberg pushed artistic boundaries. The five-time U.S. Ice Dance Champion, two-time Olympian and three-time World Championship medalist and partner Michael Seibert defied ice dancing conventions in their music, costumes and program themes.

“Our gift was our speed, our power, our depth of edge and our willingness to bring new things to the forefront that weren’t considered, let’s just say, ice dancery,” said Blumberg. “That’s what drove us. That’s what made us go year to year. And our passion for what we were putting out there, whether it was Fred & Ginger or Scheherazade or our exhibition pieces. ... The whole thing was how are we going to move ice dance forward?”

Following the 1983 season as they planned their free dance and original set pattern dance for the upcoming Olympic season, a friend who worked with American Ballet Theater (ABT) asked if someone affiliated with the company would work with Blumberg. Ballet mistress Georgina Parkinson began working with her at the Metropolitan Opera House, where ABT performs and has rehearsal space. Blumberg would enter through the backstage and go to the ballet studios.

“We worked on extension, stretching, an awareness of body and flow through the space, and she mentored me like I had never really been before by someone not in my field,” Blumberg recalled. “It was

life-changing and I am forever grateful... for her understanding of what I needed.”

Then-ABT principal dancer Robert LaFosse worked with Blumberg and Seibert on the lift that closed their Scheherazade program, which came from the George Balanchine ballet “Prodigal Son.” During that time, Blumberg was able to watch ABT rehearsals and sometimes sit in the wings during performances.

“I took it all in because I was hungry for it,” she said. “It wasn’t that I wanted to be a ballet dancer, but I wanted to have that serene beauty and quality and understanding of the movement. I will never forget that time and how it changed my trajectory in skating.”

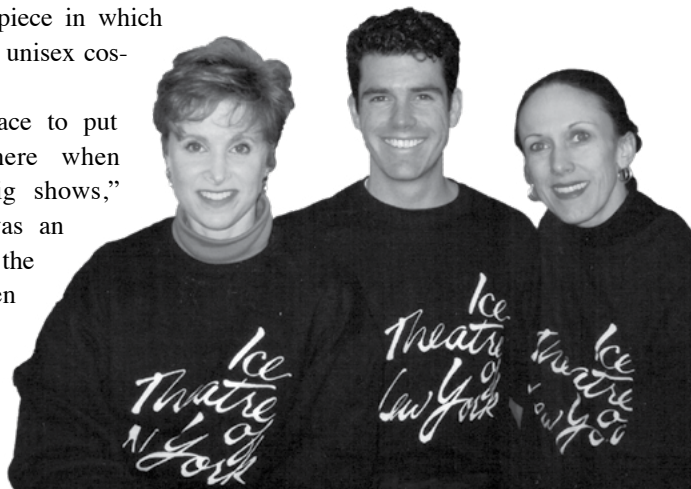
After turning professional Blumberg and Seibert became guest artists with Ice Theatre of New York (ITNY). Former artistic director Rob McBrien had choreographed two pieces for them, “Adagio for Strings” and a tango piece in which they both wore similar unisex costumes.

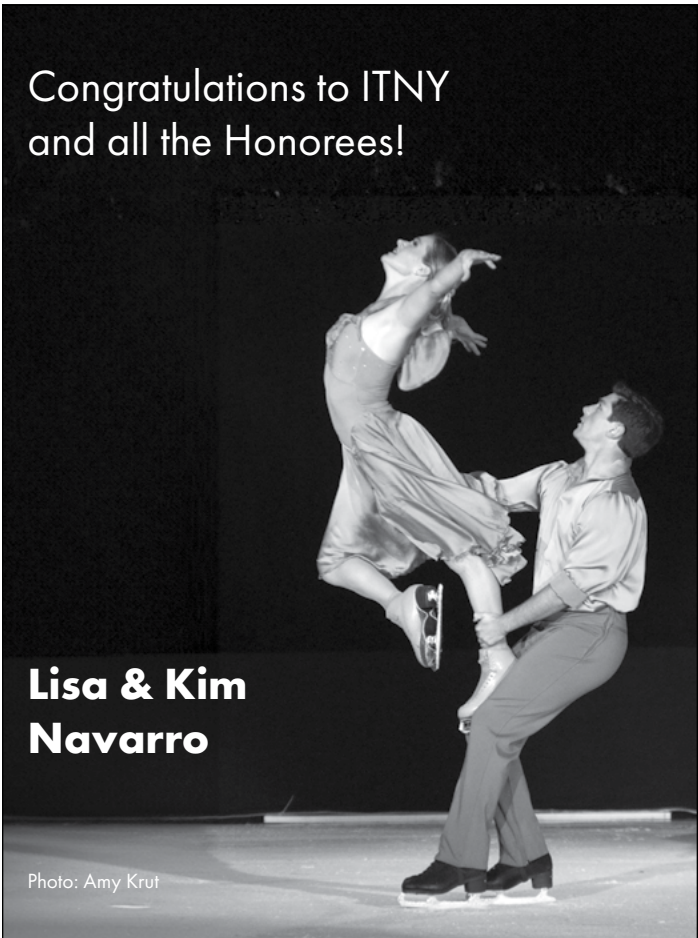
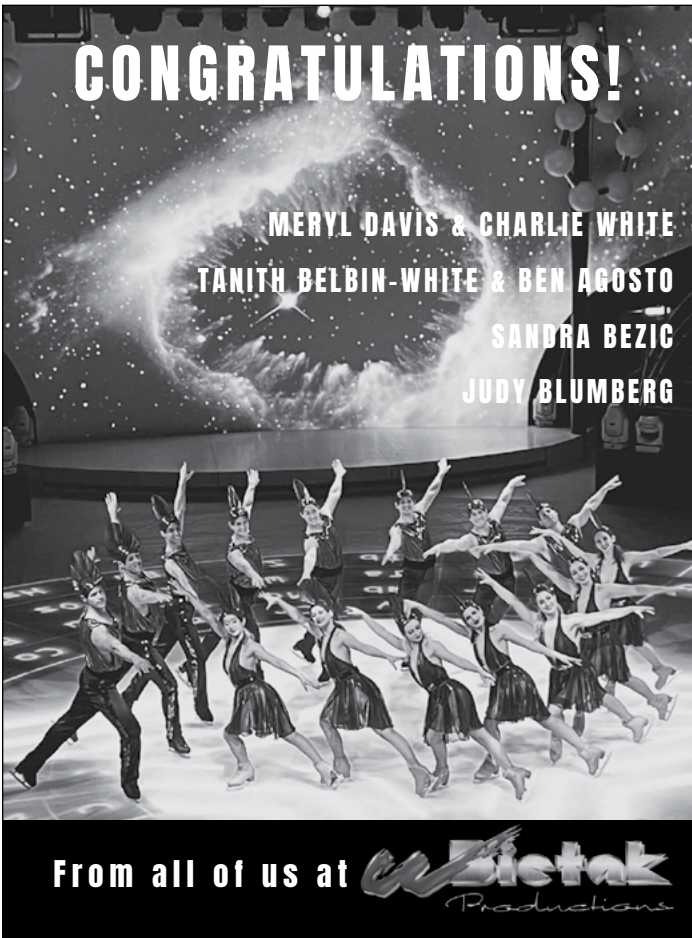
“It gave us a place to put performances out there when we weren’t doing big shows,” Blumberg said. “It was an opportunity to show the work that we’d been doing with Rob to those who we skated with every day and perform in that environment where an

audience is close. You feel the energy and the connection in a very different and more profound way than you would in an arena. It gave us a way to find the nuances in the work.”

When Seibert retired from performing, Blumberg teamed up with ice dancer Jim Yorke, with whom she also performed for ITNY. The company gave them a space to develop new programs and hone performances that they took to professional competitions.

Over time, Blumberg’s involvement with ITNY grew, becoming co-ensemble director. The position involved leading edge classes, supervising performance quality of the programs the company would perform and working in tandem with choreographers—particularly those from the dance world—to make sure their visions were coming to life on the ice.





My dears Tanith and Ben,
 and Charlie and Meryl,

Wonderful people, wonderful
 skaters, wonderful representatives
 of the sport!! With whom it has been
 my great pleasure to serve as Team
 Leader – CONGRATULATIONS
 and much love.

Taffy Holliday

The magic of dancing on ice is so
 well represented by tonight's honorees.
 The superb artistry of Olympians
 Meryl Davis and Charlie White;
 Tanith Belbin White and Ben Agosto.
 The incomparable choreographic gems
 of Sandra Bezic; and a deep memorable
 leading edge in Ice Dance, Judy
 Blumberg. I applaud and congratulate
 you all for the difference you have
 made in Figure Skating.

– ATOY WILSON



“More than anything, it was making sure that all the performers were packaged correctly from head to toe before stepping out on the ice,” Blumberg said. “Did they have the hair that was the look for the piece? Did their boots, if they had beige boots, match their skin? Were their laces tucked in? It was a refinement that I wanted to make sure that they were owning for the sake of the choreographer and their vision.”

She would work with new company members on pieces she had skated, allowing the skaters to develop their own personalities in the performance while also maintaining the integrity of the choreography. Also, she worked with skaters to grow their movement quality, always making sure that each skater tended to every detail.

“Sometimes the smallest detail missed could be the most giant detail, and I’m a detail person,” said Blumberg. “I loved working with the ensemble. It wasn’t about any one star. Working with the different choreographers was interesting. ... It was a great experience to develop a new vocabulary.”

ITNY led to a most unexpected and wonderful partnership for Blumberg. After Yorke decided to coach full-time, co-ensemble director Douglas Webster asked her to skate with him in a piece. She questioned the pairing of an ice dancer and a free skater, but Webster pushed her to try.

“It ended up being a beautiful col-

laboration on ‘Appalachia Waltz’ with JoAnna Mendl Shaw and Douglas being the co-choreographers,” she said. “It was very much a signature piece for us and Ice Theatre at the time.

“My greatest gift was being able to work with Douglas,” she added. “In ‘Appalachia Waltz’ I felt so strongly about what this piece was, how I felt when I was in it and the passion I had for performing with him and the music.

“It was such a wonderful feeling to know that my work with Michael was fantastic and amazing, and it would continue to morph and change and be just as magical with someone else.”

Blumberg was in the ITNY office when she received notification that she was a mother and she should come to China to unite with her daughter, who she named Etienne. After finalizing the adoption and bringing Etienne home from China, they settled in Sun Valley, Idaho, where they began their journey together. Blumberg was recently inducted into the Sun Valley Winter Sports Hall of Fame.

“When she came into my life in 2006, nothing changed and everything changed,” Blumberg said. “I was still able to be passionate about the world I was in and be passionate about making sure I was giving this youngster what she needed from me in so far as health, mentoring, love, support and being present through her life. She’s an amazing kid.

“I’ve learned so much from this journey with her,” she added. “She was very

independent from the get-go. We stand together and we stand with strength apart with love. She’ll be with me at the gala.”

Today, Blumberg coaches and works as a technical specialist as well as mentoring young ice dancers, which she finds very fulfilling. Skating continues to inspire her, taking time to skate by herself after giving a student a lesson. The greatness of today’s ice dance teams and those of the past decade is also inspiring. She loves seeing great skaters move into coaching and cultivate new talent, creativity and innovation.

She is also grateful to share this evening with Sandra Bezic, who choreographed Blumberg and Seibert’s Patsy Cline program that they skated to victory at World Pro. Also, it is wonderful to be with Tanith Belbin White and Ben Agosto, who were the first ice dancers since Blumberg and Seibert to win a World Championship medal.

Looking back on her career with Seibert, Blumberg remains incredibly proud of their Scheherazade program performed at the 1984 Olympic Winter Games, even though it was penalized by some judges who deemed it “not ice dance music.” It makes her proud that tonight’s fellow ITNY honorees Meryl Davis and Charlie White selected Scheherazade for their Olympic gold medal winning free dance.

“That makes me feel like it had redemption,” she said. “I was passionate about that music.”



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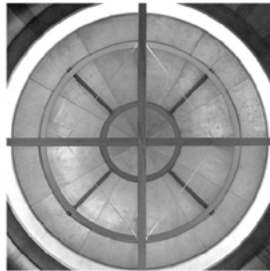
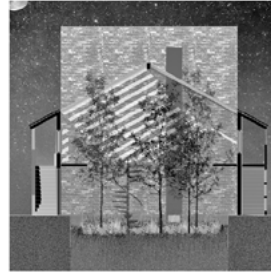
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Tanith, Ben, and Judy



Douglas Haw

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Sandra and Judy,

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To Moira,

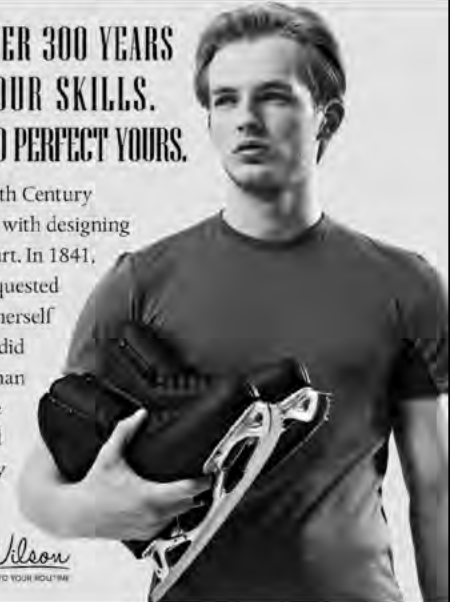
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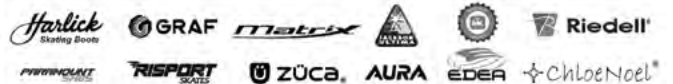


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Thanks to you all for what you have given our sport.

Rhea Schwartz & Paul Wolff

Meryl, Charlie, Tanith and Ben,

You changed the world of American Ice Dance.

Sandra and Judy - thank you for all you have done for the skating world.

To all of you, a big congratulations on the Ice Theatre of New York's recognition of your talents!

Your friend,
Randy Gardner

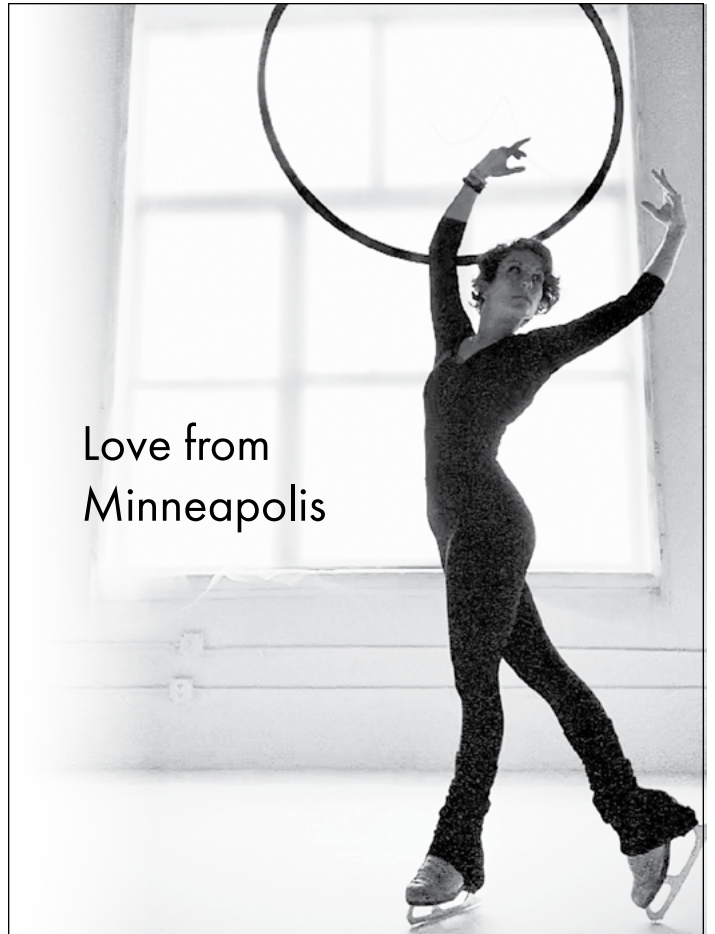
*Meryl and Charlie
Tanith and Ben*

We applaud you for your passion, artistry and relentless pursuit of excellence. You are champions in every sense of the word. And you have left an indelible mark on the world of ice dancing.

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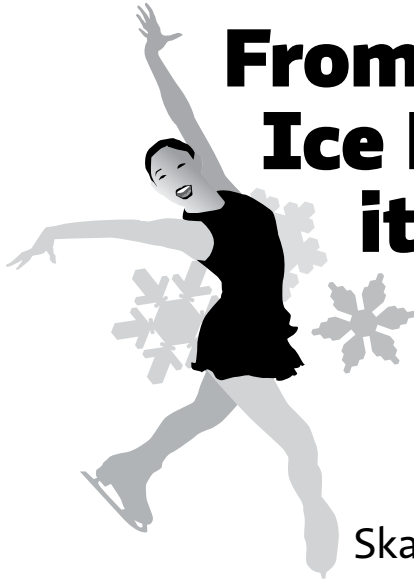
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Oona & Gage Brown

Performing Apprentices

Georgina Blackwell
Caroline Mura
Milly Wasserman



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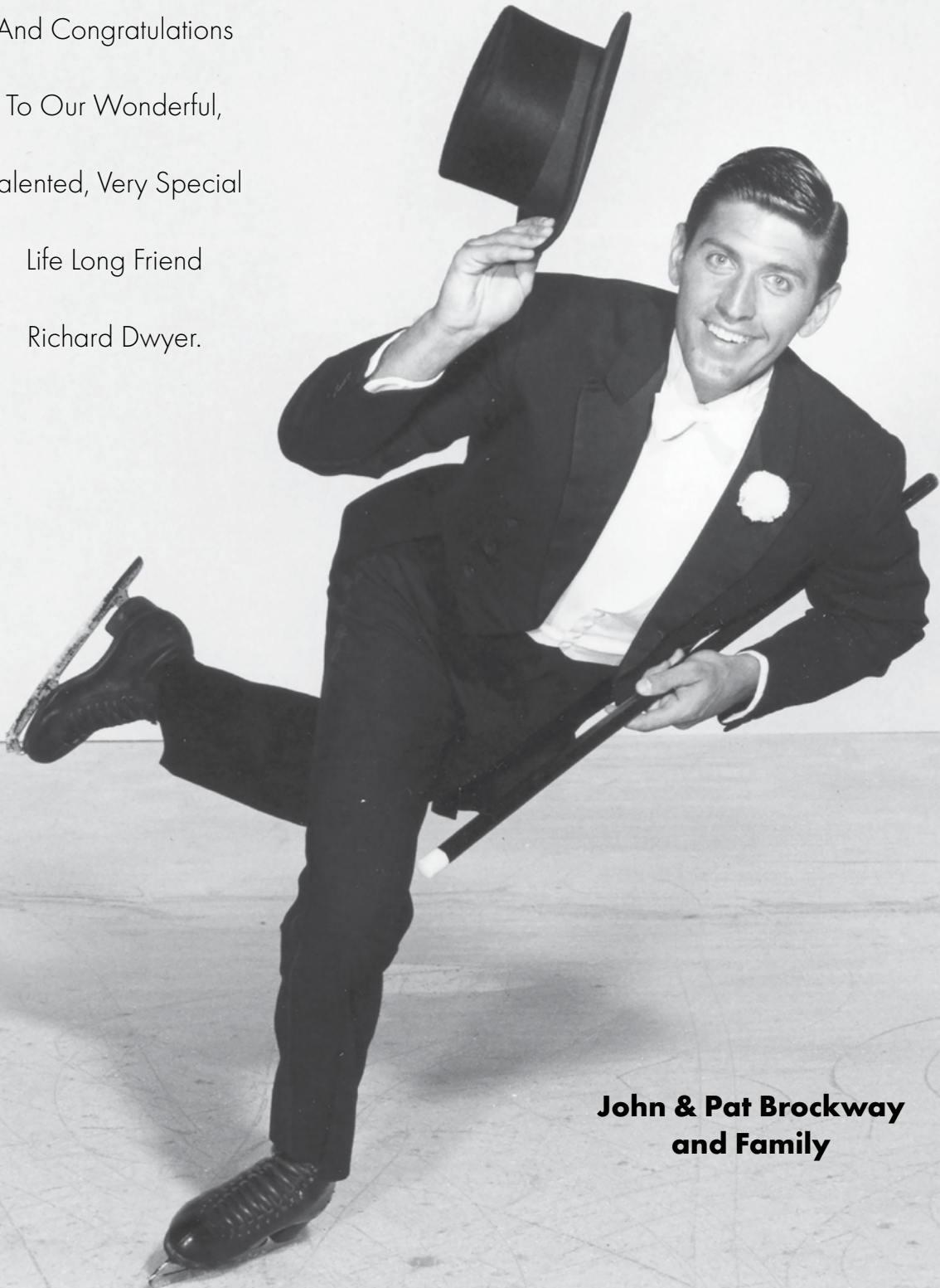
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