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BCA Artists' Ball to honor area community partners

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There would scarcely be artists in this world if not for art patrons, which is why the Boston Center for the Arts, the South End's nonprofit arts complex dedicated to sustaining artists and their relationship to the community, is holding its annual Artists' Ball on Saturday, in celebration of those community members who make supporting artists a priority.

The Artists' Ball is the BCA's single public fundraising event throughout the year, a costume bash that invites the community and city at large to participate in, celebrate and support the artistic life of Boston. This year, during the first half of the evening's Arts Champion Dinner, the BCA will thank several area community organizations that have made arts programming a priority; during the second half, the Ball itself, anyone willing to buy a ticket can get gussied up and become patrons of the arts.

"Part of [the event] every year is to give awards to arts champions, people in the community who really have a strong commitment to the arts," explained Wendy Baring-Gould, director of arts and community programs. This year's event will honor Gov. Deval Patrick for his restoration of funding to the Commonwealth's Arts Council, and two former Boston Ballet dancers, Gina DiMarco and Adriana Suarez, as well as five local social service organizations that work with the BCA to bring arts programming to their client groups. Most of the five are from the South End, including United South End Settlements, the Ellis Memorial and Eldredge House, and Inquilinos Boricuas en Accion, all of which have made arts programming accessible to their clients and central to their services. The YMCA's Huntington Branch and the Boston Asian Youth Essential Service are also being honored.

"All of these organizations have an ongoing internal commitment to providing arts programming to their clients," Baring-Gould said. This party, she said, "celebrates the artist and it celebrates the audience who appreciates the artists, and the community partners are one segment of that audience."

Last year, the BCA celebrated its 35th anniversary with the Artists' Ball, taking the opportunity to pledge their continued commitment to working with the community. This year, in honoring area social service organizations, they're making good on that pledge — more than that, however, organizers are simply looking to put on a good party.

"How many times in Boston can you go to a fancy dress costume ball?" Baring-Gould pointed out. "We're turning the corner into spring — maybe — and [the party] is just a way to have fun and kick up your heels with your neighbors, and celebrate the rich cultural history of Boston."

The event will feature visual art contributions made by the BCA artists, a costume contest complete with prizes judged by the perpetually fabulous Ryan Landry and the Gold Dust Orphans, and Afro-Latin ensemble, Mango Blue.

Proceeds from the event will benefit the BCA, its community programming, and will help subsidize the rent of its artists. Currently, the BCA buildings house 50 working artists' studios, six live/work spaces, the Mills Gallery, four theatre spaces including the new Calderwood Pavilion opened in 2004, educational and rehearsal spaces, the historic Cyclorama, the Boston Ballet, the Community Music Center of Boston, and 10 arts-based nonprofits such as City Stage and the Art Connection.

The BCA's Artists' Ball will be held in the Cyclorama, 539 Tremont St., on Sat., March 31. Tickets to the Ball are \$50; tickets to the entire evening, including the Arts Champion Awards Dinner, are \$200. Call 617.426.ARTS or visit www.bcaonline.org.