UC SANTA BARBARA

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A Bright Future

It’s all about impact.

The potential to drive things forward — people and programs alike — is what motivates John Arnhold’s vast philanthropy, including at UC Santa Barbara. No doubt the alum’s latest generosity to his alma mater will catapult it ahead immeasurably.

Arnhold ’75, with his wife Jody, a luminary in dance education, has gifted the UCSB Department of Theater and Dance with $1.25 million — the largest endowment in its history. The support establishes a production fund to secure the department’s programs for generations.

“For a civilized society, we all have to be able to read and write and think creatively and solve problems and communicate, and this is where the humanities play an essential role,” said Arnhold, who also is a UC Santa Barbara Foundation trustee. “Jody and I are firm believers in the benefits of a broad liberal arts education to teach critical skills in order to thrive in our society.

“Theater and dance are passions of ours because they demand a level of creativity that involves taking risks, generating solutions and improvising,” he continued. “We have been very impressed with the excellence of the theater and dance program at UC Santa Barbara. And we are committed to an investment in the long-term foundation of support by establishing an endowment for theater and dance production. It is our hope that this will help to realize the potential of the program and inspire others to join us in this mission.”

Said UCSB Chancellor Henry T. Yang: “Our Department of Theater and Dance is a campus jewel and maintains an international reputation thanks to the outstanding scholarship and creative work of our faculty, students and visiting artists. The Arnhold Theater and Dance Production Fund will contribute to the future sustainability and excellence of the department, providing exciting educational, technical and performance opportunities for our students, and will also inspire others to invest in our students. We are deeply grateful to John and Jody Arnhold for this gift and for their transformative philanthropy in support of our campus, including their previous gifts in support of our Department of English, which further strengthen the arts and humanities on our campus.”

The New York-based Arnholds’ expansive support across campus includes major gifts to English, to both Gaucho men’s and women’s tennis and to UCSB Arts & Lectures. They also provided funds for the UCSB Library to digitize the archives of student-run paper The Daily Nexus.

As devoted donors to theater and dance at UCSB, the Arnholds have funded campus residencies by elite performers, companies and choreographers, including former NYC Ballet principal dancer Heather Watts, Ballet Hispanico and Monica Bill Barnes. They brought noted choreographer Jacqulyn Buglisi to campus in 2016 to stage her tribute piece, “Table of Silence,” with UCSB dance majors. And, for several summers running, they have sponsored UCSB students to participate in the 92nd Street Y Dance Education Laboratory Summer Dance Intensive in New York.

The couple’s new gift takes their investment in the department — and in fact the department itself — to a new level, according to chair Risa Brainin.

“This gift gives us security for the future,” said Brainin, also a professor of theater and dance. “Part of what the gift offers is the opportunity for us to move forward with great confidence. It also sends a message to all of our current donors that their support is garnering more support. Our audiences are expanding, and our visibility in the Santa Barbara and national arts community has been steadily growing. It is clear to us that those who value the arts and humanities are aware of the work we are doing and appreciate it. The Arnholds have demonstrated their faith in us, and we are thrilled to build on the excellence we have achieved as we move into the future.”

With production “at the very heart” of the department’s work, Brainin noted, the endowment of a dedicated production fund will have sweeping, invaluable impact.

“The gift touches everyone in the department,” she said. “The plays and dance concerts we present as part of our main stage season are capstone experiences for our students as well as teaching and research for our faculty. Our BFA students in acting and dance are likely to appear on stage nearly every quarter of their 3-4 years with us. Our BA students are constantly working on productions. We produce four plays, three dance concerts and a student-written new works festival each year. The gift enables us to create professional quality work on our stages, preparing our students for the real world. And it allows us to invite top artists in theater and dance to work side by side with our students.”

That’s not all.

In addition to the aforementioned “main stage” season, Brainin added, the endowment will help support the department’s well-regarded performance programs, including The Odyssey Project, LAUNCH PAD, Santa Barbara Dance Theater, the UCSB Dance Company and Naked Shakes.

“There can be no more significant gift than ensuring the future of our production programs,” Brainin said. “We are so grateful to the Arnholds.”

Benefaction comes naturally to John Arnhold, who goes way beyond dollars when it comes to his giving — he also spends significant time on campus. He comes out regularly to meet with Arnhold Fellows in the English department, watch student presentations and visit a few classes. He volunteers as an assistant coach with the UCSB women’s tennis team, whose matches he often travels to attend. And each trip to Santa Barbara, he sees as many UCSB theater and dance productions as he can squeeze in.

Safe to say, Arnhold is not your average philanthropist. And he’ll be the first one to tell you so.

“I often say that I don’t consider myself to be a philanthropist because I look at that as somebody who just gives money, and to me it’s not about that,” Arnhold said. “I want to be involved in organizations where I can have an impact, organizations that are really open to embracing new ideas. I find that UCSB is very receptive to our ideas, willing to take some chances, and we get a lot of bang for our buck. And there is so much going on out there. Every time I visit, I come up with more things I want

to do.”

About UC Santa Barbara

The University of California, Santa Barbara is a leading research institution that also provides a comprehensive liberal arts learning experience. Our academic community of faculty, students, and staff is characterized by a culture of interdisciplinary collaboration that is responsive to the needs of our multicultural and global society. All of this takes place within a living and learning environment like no other, as we draw inspiration from the beauty and resources of our extraordinary location at the edge of the Pacific Ocean.