Dancing With the Stars

Top hoofers take a flying leap against AIDS

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On a Friday night in lower Manhattan, dancers in baggy red pants twirl across the stage. The show—*Suite Portuguesa*, a savage satire by avant-garde choreographer Christopher Williams—ends, and the exhausted bunch trickles off. One man rushes back. “Please donate on your way out,” he tells the audience. And the crowd comes through, giving $146 to Dancers Responding to AIDS (DRA), which raised $54,000 last year through audience appeals. *Suite* marked one of five DRA appeals held that weekend in Manhattan alone. Across the country, troupes are lacing up in DRA’s name to help fight a disease that has devastated their ranks, claiming such legends as Rudolph Nureyev, Alvin Ailey, Arnie Zane and scores of other talents.

“[DRA] started because we needed to do something for our friends who were dying,” says Jamie Bishton, the organization’s producer. “That personal need grew into helping our entire community.”

A program of Broadway Cares/Equity Fights AIDS (BC/EFA), a leading U.S. AIDS fundraising organization that has raised more than $100 million since 1988, DRA also boosts the Actor’s Fund of America, a social wellness and health organization for performing artists, a third of whose clients are dancers. The DRA effort (www.dradance.org) includes a student outreach project that urges young dancers to join the fundraising efforts through dance classes and shows.

“Some of these DRA donor companies are fighting for their own artistic and financial life, yet they still give,” says founder Denise Roberts Hurlin, who launched the organization with fellow dancer Hernando Cortez in 1991. They danced with the mighty Paul Taylor company in the 1990s and watched two colleagues die of AIDS. But Hurlin and Cortez didn’t take the news sitting down. DRA’s motto: “When AIDS is stopped, we will dance for joy—until then, we dance for life.”

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