

Dr. Ana Maria Maynard

Founder of the Puerto Rican Folkloric Dance & Cultural Center in Austin, Texas

Director and Choreographer of PRF Dance's professional-level performing company



QUICK FACTS:

- **Favorite Musicians:** Soneros del Barrio & the Spanish Harlem Orchestra on the salsa side; Parcumbe, Modesto Cepeda, and Francisco Cholo Rosario in the folklórico realm.
- **Hobbies:** Playing and learning a multitude of instruments
- **Professional and Personal Goals:** They are one and the same and all center around increased funding and support for the dance and cultural center and a permanent residence to call home.
- **Website:** www.prfdance.org

Like many children born in Puerto Rico, special events and holidays meant festive celebrations with music and dance for young Ana Maria Maynard from Caguas, Puerto Rico. Maynard was raised in the Bronx, New York, received her undergraduate degree in Brooklyn from Polytechnic University and her doctorate in Electrical and Computer Engineering from Carnegie Mellon University in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

Maynard had been torn between her two passions when it came to choosing a career path. She had a passion for music and dance, and also loved math and science. She credits the film *Star Wars* for inspiring her to think about a career in engineering. While studying in Pittsburgh, Maynard felt as if there were no other Puerto Ricans in the entire city and that she was truly alone without her culture. Luckily, she met a friend from Mayaguez, Puerto Rico, who helped her keep her culture in check and then she later met her future husband there, whom she claims to have transformed into a Latino at heart. After six years in Pittsburgh, Maynard decided she would never again live in a place that lacked the music and culture she so desired to be immersed in. While applying for jobs, an opportunity arose to work at IBM in Austin, Texas. She was so appreciative of the warmth she felt there, especially from the Latino community, which is mostly of Mexican heritage, that she decided Austin was the place for her.

Though fulfilling her love of math and science by working as the program director of the IBM Austin Center for Advanced Studies, Maynard still needed to fill that void in her life as far as music and culture were concerned. It was especially after her first child was born that she realized she wanted her children to be raised in her culture, as she had been. Maynard therefore founded the Puerto Rican Folkloric Dance & Cultural Center in 1997 and serves as the director as well as the choreographer of PRF Dance's professional-level performing company. The cultural center and dance company are dedicated to the preservation and authentic representation of Puerto Rican culture and are approaching their eighth year of existence. The center provides classes in Traditional Dance with Cultural Lessons, Percussion, Youth Choir, Music Ensemble, Professional Music Ensemble and even Ritmo Aerobics. They currently have over 60 students enrolled for the new semester with a wonderful diversity of ages and ethnicities. They hold two performances each year (the winter performance serves as a showcase for the students of the center) and travel to local schools, universities and events for performances. The dance company would love nothing more than to spread their passion for Puerto Rican folkloric dance, music and culture across the entire country. With funding a constant issue, however, that is one goal that has been thus far out of reach.

A woman of many talents, Dr. Maynard has studied many forms of dance, piano, guitar, barrill, pandero and cuatro, and is constantly teaching herself new instruments and taking lessons from the best instructors Boriquen has to offer. She teaches adult dance, directs the music program, and gives cultural lessons to classes at all levels. The legacy continues as Dr. Maynard's son is currently taking percussion classes and her daughter loves to sing and dance.

The Puerto Rican Folkloric Dance & Cultural Center offers classes from ages five to adult and the performance company holds auditions for new members of its performance company on a regular basis. You don't have to be Puerto Rican, or even Latino for that matter, to be a member of the company, but you do need to have talent, charisma and most importantly, a passion and commitment to the organization. PRFD and Cultural Center is supported by the National Endowment for the Arts, the Texas Commission on the Arts, the Austin Arts Commission, the Institute of Puerto Rican Culture and the Puerto Rican Federal Affairs Administration, among others. Dr. Maynard has found the people of Austin, Texas to be an open-minded community who are enthusiastic about her work and the culture she has brought to their city. Dr. Maynard hopes that her "escuelita" will be recognized as one of the most wonderful places in the mainland United States for learning music, dance and culture. We're here to say it definitely is! ■