The Aliso Viejo campus of Soka University of America was the serene setting for the Ninth Annual Peace Gala. The eclectic gathering met first at the stunning Soka Performing Arts Center to enjoy cocktails and hors d'oeuvres and bid on silent auction items, before crossing a bridge over Peace Lake that was lined by grateful Soka students holding candles, thanking each guest for attending as they passed. Dynamic Japanese Taiko drummers heralded guests as they entered the venue. Joan May and Dita Shemke returned as event co-chairs for the seventh consecutive year, with Carolina Shorter serving as the 2013 honorary chair, and actor Ron Glass ("Barney Miller") as master of ceremonies. In the audience was Kareem Abdul-Jabbar, jazz pianist Keiko Matsui and Broadway star Ivan Rutherford. They and 544 guests enjoyed a delicious dinner catered by The Resort at Pelican Hill and entertainment by three-time Grammy-winning jazz musician and singer Esperanza Spalding. She was mesmerizing, practically performing a pas de deux with her stand up bass, while scatting along with nineteen-time Grammy winner jazz saxophonist Wayne Shorter and others. The crowd was moved by inspirational stories from two of Soka's students, while the fundraiser added some $500,000 to the Scholarship Endowment, which goes directly to students of the university that is ranked in the top 50 liberal arts colleges in the nation by US News and World Report's "Best Colleges 2014."  —J.A.