

Weeklong jam culminates in New Dance Performance

by David Koteen

On Sunday, March 29 at 8 pm Joint Forces Dance Company and the Community Center for the Performing Arts will host a unique cultural phenomenon. The 4th Annual New Dance Performance will be the distillation of 40 people's work from the previous week's workshop/jam session at Breitenbush. They are not a touring troupe, not a dance company. They are a group of multi-talented artists who work independently throughout the nation, in the eclectic media known as New Dance.

These performers are an integral part of a larger group, a menagerie of individuals; they are dancers, martial arts students, gymnasts, body workers, therapists, and interested persons who are flying, training, busing, and driving, collectively, some 100,000 miles, spending \$10,000, taking 10 days of their lives to practice and participate in this movement mandala. What the Eugene-based dance company Joint Forces started five years ago as a weekend Contact Improvisational Jam has become today a prestigious national event.

The attraction which unites these New Dancers generates a momentum which steadily builds towards the performance itself. It will include some of the finest New Dancers of the nation: Nancy Stark Smith, one of Contact's originators; Eugene's own Alito Alessi and Karen Nelson; Seat-

tle poet Terrie Yaffe; Hughthir White, Sharon Tomsy and Alan Ptashke from the SF Bay area; bold and playful Riccardo Morrison from Santa Barbara; Carol Swann, Felice Wolfzahn and Kurt Koegel from New York City.

An essential component of New Dance is Contact Improvisation. Often called an *art-sport*, it is neither fish nor fowl. It is an easily recognizable form, in the same way that Impressionist painting or Minimalist music is. It elicits strong reactions from people who view it—reactions which fly the spectrum between black and white, joy and repugnance, annoyance and elation. In *The Knowing Body*, Louise Steinman says:

Contact is a duet form in which partners share the demands and gifts of weight and momentum. The partners rebound off each other, they give and take weight. Unlike traditional dancing, where balance is defined by an upward stretch along the body's sturdy central column, in Contact any body part that can bear weight might be a fulcrum. Contact dancers move upside down, bear weight on hands and heads, become accustomed to spatial disorientation. Contact looks somewhat like noncompetitive wrestling, somewhat like lovemaking,

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somewhat like the jitterbug. It is aerial and daring and rolling.

There is an idea or concept which is often abbreviated as "the '60s," when someone says "the '60s," certain Pavlovian salivas begin to form. It was a period when a new pulse began beating in every capillary of the American culture. Dance was no exception.

Steve Paxton, well-schooled in the Modern Dance tradition (working extensively with Merce Cunningham) began to investigate the ways this pulse expressed itself in the realm of movement. He had studied and performed and taught widely. As he started to experiment, he met kindred

spirits, among them Nancy Stark Smith, who was to become a major influence in the evolution of Contact.

The first performance to be called "Contact Improvisation" was in New York 15 years ago. Since that initial meeting (which included Eugene video producer Steve Christiansen), CI has become an important element in many university dance programs. Classes, workshops and jams occur regularly in numerous cities around the world, and often in Eugene. Edited by Nancy Stark Smith and Lisa Nelson, an eloquent, energetic magazine, *Contact Quarterly*, has entered its 12th year of publication.

It covers all types of innovative movement, body awareness programs, healing practices, experimental dance theory and choreography.

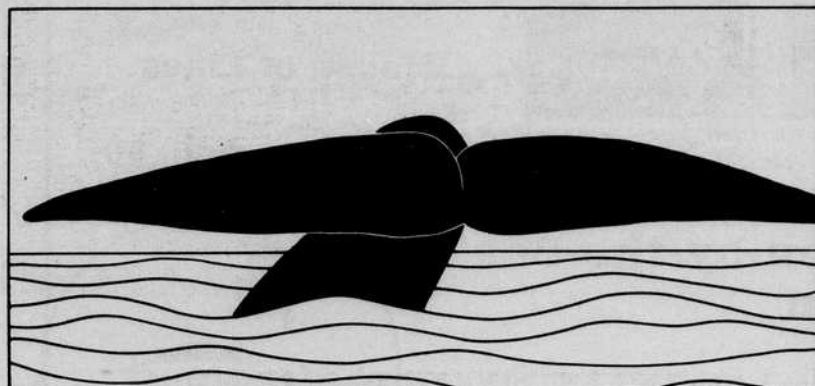
Thanks greatly to Steve Paxton's reluctance to establish a set of rules or format for teaching Contact Improv, precisely what it is eludes definition. It is a work in progress—an intricate form for people to move in harmony and/or juxtaposition. Instead of facing towards the future, waiting for a better time, putting your body in someone else's choreography, Contact encourages a yielding and compliance with physical realities— inertia, balance, sensation, friction, momentum, gravity. When two people come together, beginning from a point of contact, they allow these physical laws, which apply to each individually, to apply to themselves together.

When asked in 1977 on CBC radio, "What is the point of Contact?", Mr. Paxton replied:

Just the pleasure of moving and the pleasure of using your body is, I think, maybe, the main point of dancing with an unplanned and spontaneous way, where you're free to invent and they're free to invent and you're neither one hampering the other. That's a very pleasant social form.

In the past years the New Dance Performance has included human theater, unusual vocal inventions, various visual effects, slides and videos, improvised music, and many spontaneous elements. Considering the dedication and exceptional quality of this year's performers, there is really only one way to know for sure what will happen.

Tickets are \$4.50 in advance and \$5.50 the day of the performance.



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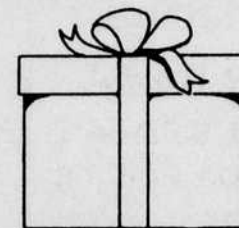
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