

Dance calendar filled with a smorgasbord of motion



There's a lot more going on in the University dance department this year than simply ballet and jazz.

The 1984-85 dance calendar is filled with a smorgasbord of classical productions, student performances and theatrical collaborations.

The department is offering courses and workshops in everything from Renaissance dance styles to breakdancing. In addition, the Song and Dance Troupe, Dobre Folk Ensemble and Concert Dance Theater each will have performances throughout the year.

This term, faculty members are focusing their energy on Dance '85, an annual concert that is co-produced by the Dance and Theater departments. "We've already started into the rehearsal schedule," says Caroline Shell, graduate coordinator and head of the dance department. The show will run from Jan. 24 to 31 and Feb. 1 and 2 in the Robinson Theatre, and promises to be "the big, major dance concert" of the term, Shell says.

In the spring, students from almost all the dance courses will rehearse, choreograph and perform in their own concert May 17, 18 and 19.

Twice each school year, the department invites a guest artist to teach at the University. Shell says that they will try to arrange for a guest artist to work with students for a week to 10 days in the fall and about

three days during spring term. Last year's artist was Robin Johnson, who both teaches dance at California State University and tours professionally.

Two graduate students will give their masters' thesis concerts as well; one on Dec. 7 and 8, and another April 12 and 13. Both concerts will be held in the Frances M. Dougherty Theater in Gerlinger Annex. "Our graduate student concerts are usually some of our biggest drawing events," says Shell.

Collaborations between the dance, and theater departments and the music school have proved very successful in recent years. "After doing 'West Side Story' last year, we were all just chomping at the bit to do another three-way coordinated event," Shell says.

"We will be working with the theater department with their dramatic production of 'Romeo and Juliet' in the spring. Our Dobre Folk Ensemble will be doing the dance sequences, and Ken Aldrich will be instructing the actors in the movement style of the period," she says.

The Dobre Folk Ensemble performs at folk festivals and public schools throughout the Northwest. They also appear at University sports events, in musical productions and in the annual Dance Concert. Ken Aldrich, director of ensemble, says the group learns social dance forms which encompass folk and ethnic styles from Europe and the Americas. They also study dances from Renaissance and Baroque eras to more modern forms such as swing, tango, Charleston and "hand jive" from the '60s.

Dancers in the cast of "Romeo and Juliet" will be required to take the Renaissance Dance course which Aldrich teaches. He says that this will help to prepare them for the production.

In addition to the spring production and Dance '85, the Folk Ensemble will participate in the Shrovetide Festival during the first week of May. This annual celebration of folk culture includes art, films, dance and special speakers.

As one of the department's goals for the year, Shell says that she would like to see some sort of follow-up to a dance science symposium that was held at the University in conjunction with the Olympic Scientific Congress this past July.

"It was very, very successful," she says. "This year, we are shaping a curriculum at the graduate level to forward

the study of dance science, primarily in the biomechanical, kinesiological areas. We think this would be a first such curriculum in the United States."

A second ambition is to acquire computers which can be programmed for Laban Dance Notation. This system, named after its German creator, uses symbols such as squares and triangles to notate dance movements just as musical scores are notated. In this way, even very complicated dance movements can be recorded much more quickly and accurately.

"In the dance science area, the computers would not only do the obvious things like analyze data, but (they) would also help us to be able to graphically explore pedagogical... and biomechanical questions with three-dimensional graphics," Shell says. "They just seem imperative if we're going to stay on top." Because of the amount of work needed to secure grant support, however, she believes that it will take at least two years to acquire such a system.

Two new dance workshops will be offered through the SHAPE program this year, Shell says. Breakdancing and the "rock'n'roll, Jitterbug" style of dance, will be taught by guest artists from West Germany. For next year's curriculum, a new course in "character dancing," or the balletic form of folk dancing, will be created and instructed by a graduate student.


The career choices open to dance students are varied, although Shell says that most don't know right away what they want when they come in other than to learn to dance. Many enter the performance-choreography field, which is the primary focus of the department. Some go into teaching and are eventually able to open their own studios.

Shell says, "We've also gotten a lot of students who are interested in studying dance because they want to become the equivalent of what athletic trainers are in sports" and go into the areas of dance science and medicine.

The foundation of the department is modern dance, as it provides the broadest base on which to support a curriculum. Shell says that faculty advisors help students to work within this foundation and to explore their many options for the future. Strict discipline and hard work are integral to the philosophy of the program, but, as Shell stresses "above all, we try to teach (students) how to live life."

"And, of course, enjoying it," she adds. "There's nothing better than moving."

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