

Dionysis of Dance

HULT CENTER — Like a sinuous serpent gliding up through the waves, a single dancer — a mermaid — rises to survey her surroundings, seeming larger than life in her flowing costume and long, chestnut drapes of hair. The dancer is Margie Gillis, who is known as the "Goddess of Dance" in her native Canada.

"The effect was pure beauty. Long hair streaming, gown rippling, body as pliant as a mermaid's..." wrote the South China Morning Post of her performance of Stephanie Ballard's Mara. Critics praise the warmth and stage presence that enables Gillis to connect with the audience on a personal level and evoke every sort of emotional response. "One doesn't come across the flame-like intensity of a dancer like Margie Gillis too often," wrote the New York Times, while the Toronto Star said watching Gillis "is like having someone grasp your heart and give it a big squeeze."

The daughter of two Olympic skiers and the sister to Christopher Gillis of the Paul Taylor Dance Company, Gillis has been dancing since she was three. She took classes until she was an adolescent, but stopped when her parents' divorce temporarily shattered her emotional world.

At the age of 18 Gillis returned to her classes and made a firm commitment to be a performer. When she stopped taking classes, her colleagues became her mentors. Her method of dance study has evolved from formal dance training to an independently derived inspiration from her observations. She said she uses whatever she feels she needs at a particular stage of her artistic journey.

Gillis can be described as a Dionysis of dance, as opposed to her Apollonian brother Christopher, with whom she has performed extensively. However, they differ in their styles and approaches to dance form. Of her brother's love for structure and line, Gillis said, "I am not so much interested in form as in what the initial impulse is. How does a thought translate physically? How are archetypes and philosophies and images physicalized?"

Physical expressions of emotion are the core of her dances, and her movements are performed on a stage free from fancy props and sets. The result is that the audience is "not so much aware of technique as of a fierce energy ignited by gymnastic strength," wrote the San Francisco Chronicle.

Gillis also deals with social and human issues, such as in Mara, in which a mermaid who aspires to be human but is trapped in her fish tail, and in Nocturne, in which an aging woman struggles with the pain of lost youth and vitality.

Gillis single-handedly introduced modern dance to China in 1979 and was named a Canadian Cultural Ambassador in 1981 for her extensive work throughout Europe and Asia. In addition to her solo performances, she has appeared with Momix, Stephanie Ballard and Les Grands Ballets Canadiens' production of Dracula.

She is often compared to Isadora Duncan for her larger-than-life physical presence, the same heart-on-sleeve response to music and the same solo concert format. She is distinguished by her spontaneity and her seamless movements.

Gillis performs in the Hult Center Soreng Theatre Jan. 15 and 16 at 7:30 p.m. Tickets are available at the EMU and at the Hult Center or by phone at 687-5000. Gillis will share her artistic philosophies and her choreography techniques in a "meet the artist" opportunity Jan. 14 at 12:15 p.m. in the Hult Center Lobby. She will also conduct a choreography workshop Jan. 14 from 7 to 8:30 p.m. in the University's Gerlinger Annex. To register for the workshop, call Sherrie Barr at 346-3382 by Jan. 8.



Margie Gillis of Canada will perform her unique solo dance at the Hult Center Jan. 15 and 16.

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