Gospel group celebrates ten years

By Marion Suitor
Emerald Contributor

Ten years ago, a musical group of 23 members had to give concerts in the orchestra room at the music school.

Today, the 130 people involved in the University Gospel Ensemble are having a hard time finding a place for concerts large enough to hold the ever-expanding audiences.

This term marks the 10th anniversary of the ensemble, and John Gainer, founder and director of the group, couldn't be more pleased with its popularity.

"I find pleasure in the fact that students find the class innovative and fun," Gainer said. "It's been an interesting 10 years."

However, the ensemble didn't always meet with as much approval as it does now.

When Gainer started the group winter term of 1983, it was only as an experimental class that had two terms to justify its existence. It was difficult to find rooms to rehearse in, and Gainer had to coerce the dean of the music school into giving the gospel ensemble a place to perform.

"It hasn't always been as easy as it is now," Gainer said. "We were sort of a motherless child, floating from place to place, searching for a permanent home."

The group's reputation spread and spring term enrollment was up to 53 singers and an instrumental section.

The dean of the music school was impressed, and Gainer's experimental ensemble was offered as an official class the following fall term.

"We had won over the dean and faculty," Gainer said, "and it was all uphill from there."

The 150 students who auditioned for the class that term were accepted, but when the group ballooned to 280 members winter term and rehearsals had to be moved to 180 PLC, Gainer knew it was time to limit enrollment.

"They had to cart a piano over from the music building for rehearsal," he said. "I hated to turn people away, but the size was getting out of hand."

Gainer decided 150 singers and a rhythm section was the number of people he could handle and still teach effectively. Last fall term, Gainer cut that number down to 125.

"Our rehearsal space only holds 125, and with the rhythm section up front, it can get kind of crowded," he said.

Gainer said he would like to cap enrollment of the class at 100 so the group could be more polished and professional. He said he has requested that another gospel ensemble class be started, but lack of funds and the absence of another director make expansion unlikely.

"It takes a lot of work and energy to put a group like this together," Gainer said. "I don't know who is willing to commit to leading another."

Individual members of the choir often step up to the microphone and belt out an impromptu solo, and occa-

Photo by Anthony Forney

John Gainer, director and founder of the University Gospel Ensemble, has worked to see his group improve and grow during the past 10 years.

sionally a smaller ensemble is featured during concerts.

Junior LeAnne Patterson, a singer in the group, enjoys singing in the smaller ensembles because she finds it more difficult than singing in the larger group.

"The small groups are more challenging," she said. "And I think they are sometimes more enjoyable both for the crowd and the singers."

Gainer's teaching style differs from the usual methods used by choir directors. The group does not use sheet music. They learn songs by repeating lyrics and notes Gainer recalls from memories of songs he sang at the pentecostal church he attended as a child.

"I have a gift for listening to something and remembering the tune," Gainer said. "Besides, once the students are exposed to good gospel music, it doesn't take

Brand, ASUO: Activism may help offset Measure 5

By Natasha Shepard
Emerald Contributor

University President Myles Brand and ASUO Vice President Karmen Fore encouraged students to actively endorse tax reform to counteract Ballot Measure 5 at a special panel Wednesday.

The panel, which also included University Housing Director Mike Eyster and member of the University Senate and history Professor John Nicols, discussed budget cuts and future restructuring due to the measure.

The Measure 5 budget cuts are expected to result in the loss of a total of 296 jobs and numerous programs by June 30, Brand said.

Brand reported Governor Barbara Roberts' recommendation was that tuition increase seven percent per year, whereas the State Board of Education recommended an increase closer to 15 percent. Brand predicted the increase will lie somewhere between, but closer to seven percent.

Voters passed Measure 5 in an effort to help create a fairer tax structure, though two years have passed without a successful attempt at legislation to fill the void in revenue left by the measure.

As the state pays for basic school costs without the revenue generated by property taxes cut by Measure 5, other programs experience a cut in budget, including higher education.

Fore is one of two students representing the University on the Oregon Student Lobby, which is now advocating tax reform to counteract the measure.

OSL endorsed the VanVliet sales tax bill, which proposes a three to five percent sales tax dedicated solely to education, Fore said. Food, medicine and shelter would be exempt from the tax.

A tax reform lobby day is planned for March 3. Buses will take students to the capitol, where a rally will take place and students will be encouraged to talk to their representatives about their concern for the future of higher education in Oregon.

Brand said college students have the power to counteract the measure through voting. Fore encouraged students to attend the tax reform rally in Salem. Buses will meet at 10:30 a.m. on the corner o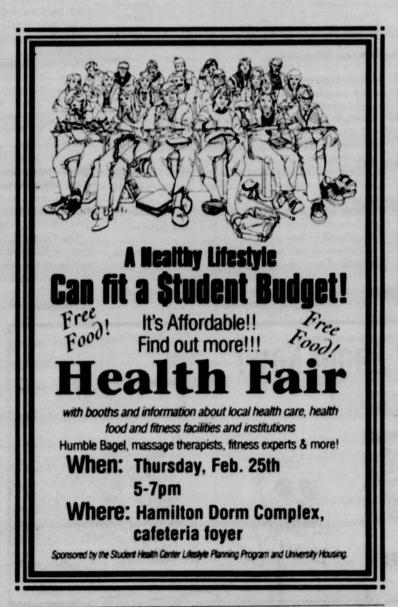f 12th Avenue and University Street March 3.