

# A TRIP TO THE ISLES

■ Poet and storyteller Patricia Mees Armstrong has traveled the world writing poetry and enjoying life

By Rebecca Wilson  
Oregon Daily Emerald

Patricia Mees Armstrong enjoys telling stories. Her eyes light up as she expounds on subjects ranging among travel, motherhood, education, journalism, health and the earnings her husband is making for her. "You have to stop me," she warns, "or I'll just get completely off track."

Sometimes, when Armstrong realizes she is going off on a tangent, she catches herself: "But that's another story," she says.

Fortunately, she puts her stories to good use. She has published numerous critically acclaimed short stories, and in January, she finished her fourth book of poetry.

Armstrong, 67, has been writing poetry for 55 years — her first poem was published in *Seventeen* magazine when she was 12 years old. The year was 1949 and she received \$5 for her efforts.

Photographs of Ireland, modern art and pencil sketches of small boys decorate Armstrong's east Eugene apartment. Irish folk music floats through the homey living room, while mugs of artificially sweetened tea steam on the kitchen table. The apartment is neat — even the desk where Armstrong composes her poetry and stories.

But somehow, the apartment seems temporary: Armstrong and her husband, Richard, have been married 46 years — and this is their

50th address. The couple have lived "literally around the world" in places as diverse as Guam, Crete, Nepal and California. Now, despite their dubious health, the Armstrongs continue to see the world.

"Now we seem to just gravitate between Ireland and Eugene," said Armstrong, who holds citizenship in both the United States and the Republic of Ireland.

Armstrong was able to acquire dual citizenship because her father was born in Ireland, but for all her globe trotting, she didn't visit the island until several years ago.

"I avoided Ireland, even though it was part of my roots," she said.

The Armstrongs finally made the trip on a suggestion from a friend who is a professor of Celtic studies. What started out to be a simple visit to family members turned into an artistic and cultural journey.

"I finally found people who looked like me," said Armstrong, who is an only child.

She also found an artistic community she could identify with. She described a group of friends who meet in the back room of a pub every couple weeks to play music, tell stories or, in Armstrong's case, read poems. "They say, 'Hey Yank! How 'bout a poem?'" she said. "I feel at home there; those people wrap their arms around me."

This feeling led to Armstrong's newest book of poetry, "On the Road to Laragh and Beyond."

"Laragh is an actual village," she said, "but in my mind it isn't. I had the idea of composites for my characters." So Armstrong's book is fictional — but not entirely.

"I'm a little concerned that my Irish friends will think the poems

are specific," she joked.

Armstrong's last book, "Daring to Dance, Refusing to Die," chronicled her struggle and triumph over breast cancer. She donated all profits to breast cancer research.

Although Armstrong triumphed over breast cancer, she has struggled with other health problems ever since. Her husband also has health issues. But the couple aren't deterred by health constraints: "We aren't statistics," she said. "I'm not my breast, and Richard isn't his heart."

Nevertheless, Armstrong included some poems about surviving cancer in "The Road to Laragh and Beyond."

Armstrong's writing has received critical notice from Oregon Literary Arts, Inc. and Willamette Writers. But readers enjoy her poems for the insights they offer into everyday life. Bob Welch, a columnist for *The Register-Guard*, said that "discovering the poetry of Patricia Mees Armstrong is like discovering an unbroken sand dollar on the beach. Armstrong's poetry is lyrical reporting from one who writes, appropriately as both visitor to Ireland and one rooted deeply in its soil."

Armstrong enjoys reading her poetry; she has given public readings in small bookstores for her previous books. The public will have the opportunity to hear Armstrong read her latest poems at Tsunami Books at 2 p.m. on March 17. For more information, call 345-8986.

## On the Road to Laragh And Beyond



Courtesy Patricia Mees Armstrong felt inspired to write the poetry in 'The Road to Laragh and Beyond' after tromping around Ireland with her husband.

## Personality, variety set stage for dance trio performance

■ Relax with the Armchair Adventures concert at the Hult Center this weekend

By Rebecca Wilson  
Oregon Daily Emerald

Three dancers clothed in an array of well-worn, mismatched tights and leotards twirl, leap and glide across a practice room at the Dance Theatre of Oregon. To untrained eyes, the motion of their slender bodies seems graceful and elegant, but the choreographer knows they have yet to achieve perfection.

"Turn your body more ... look all the way up to the ceiling," he instructs.

Then the dancers smile knowingly and begin the sequence again.

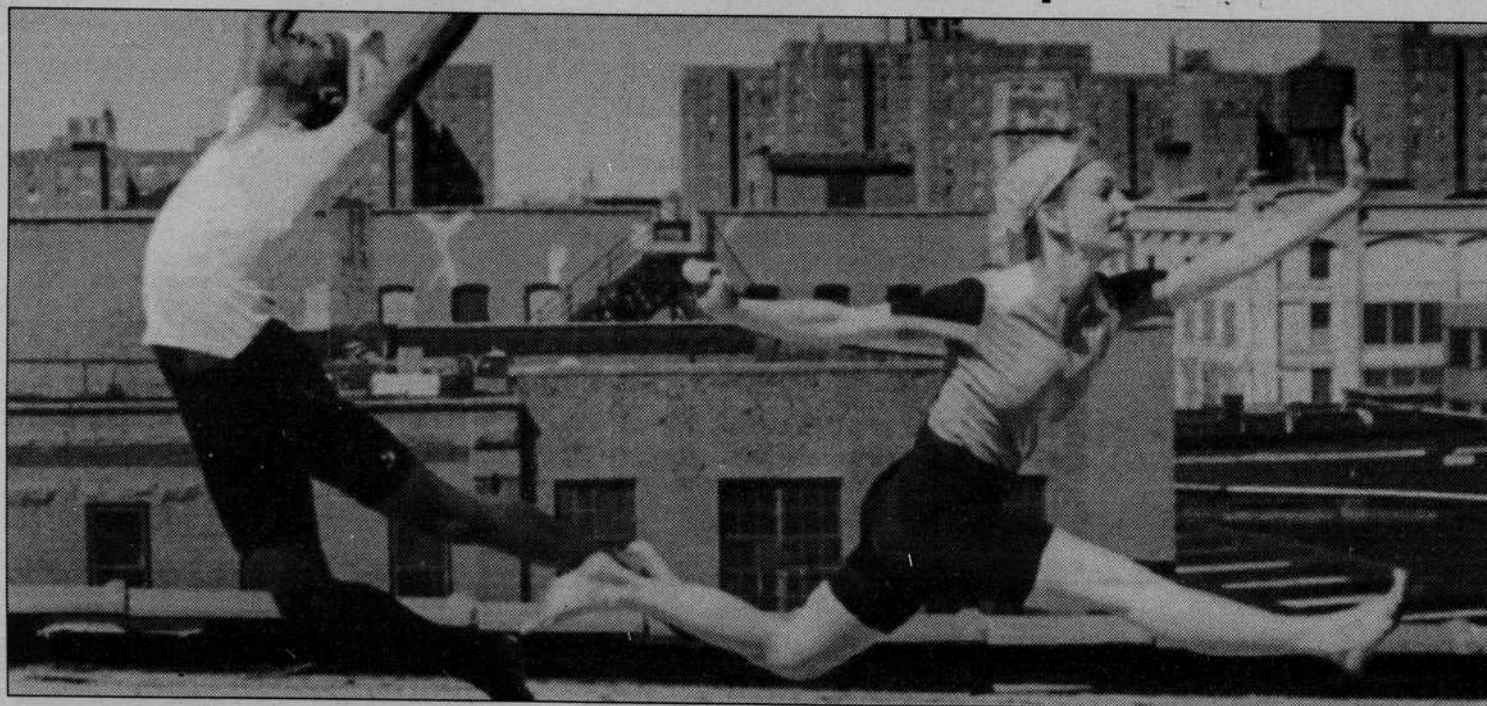
The trio is composed of Pamela Lehan-Siegel and Marc Siegel, who are the artistic directors at the Dance Theatre of Oregon, and Amy Stoddart, an assistant professor in the University's dance department.

Lehan-Siegel said she feels privileged to work with Stoddart. "In Eugene, we felt that she was one of the most accomplished people in ballet," she said. "We wanted someone of her caliber."

Stoddart, who received a master of fine arts degree from the University of Colorado at Boulder, said her biggest challenge has been balancing teaching and rehearsal.

"This is like my research," she said. "It's been ... an intense rehearsal process. It's fatiguing and exciting."

Stoddart comes by her fatigue honestly. The trio has practiced four hours a day for weeks with choreographer Kennet Oberly. On Feb. 24



Courtesy Members of the Dance Theatre of Oregon soar against the backdrop of a city skyline. They will fly on stage with the Armchair Adventures concert Sunday at the Hult Center.

and 25, the group will perform Oberly's "The Ghost Rags" as part of the Dance Theatre of Oregon's Armchair Adventures concert.

Oberly said he created "The Ghost Rags" especially for the Dance Theatre of Oregon. The dance "really incorporates the personalities of the three dancers," he said.

"The source of the music is ragtime," Oberly said, "and I love ragtime." He said the music is a "rag suite" composed by William Bol-

com, who was part of the ragtime renaissance of the 1960s.

"He was one of the few who really got into the shoes of old ragtime," Oberly said. "I can empathize. I've had to transport myself as well."

Spirits and ghosts are the basic idea behind "The Ghost Rags," Oberly said, but "emotionally ... there is no actual story. Ghosts are just a shooting-off place. There aren't any specific ghosts."

The Armchair Adventures also

features "Eirenanach" and "Fabrique: Exhibits A Through E," which are choreographed by Lehan-Siegel, and "Men's Group" and "Dad's Group," choreographed by Marc Siegel, who also wrote the musical score for "Dad's Group."

Siegel said the concert will showcase a variety of dance forms, from ballet to post-modern, and interesting set and prop additions. The dancers will wear original costumes by resident designer Sher Alltucker.

"The idea behind the Armchair Adventures concert is to [see a variety of dances] from the comfort of your armchair," Siegel said. "Open your mind ... Every piece is totally different."

The Armchair Adventures will be performed in the Soreng Concert Hall at the Hult Center on Feb. 24 at 7:30 p.m. and Feb. 25 at 2:30 p.m. Tickets are \$17 for adults and \$12 for children. For more information, contact the Hult Center at 682-5000.