

'Gallery' gives dance student time in spotlight

Master of Fine Arts student Sarah Ebert will perform in 'Dance Gallery' Saturday night in Gerlinger Annex

By Natasha Chilingirian
Pulse Reporter

The choreographer's role is an essential one in the dance business. Their ideas serve as launching pads for new dance works while dancers, chosen for their talent and stage presence, convey the choreographers' inventions to audiences.

But University Master of Fine Arts dance student Sarah Ebert is focusing on her role as the communicator — not the creator — during her journey as a professional dancer.

"It's my job to bring the choreography to life, and to slip into whatever people need me to be," Ebert said. "It's a vital part to keeping the art form alive."

Ebert will perform in "Dance Gallery," a solo concert of pieces by three different choreographers Saturday. After graduating in June, Ebert will join Portland-based modern dance troupe Minh Tran & Company.

The 27-year-old graduate student from Kankakee, Ill., said her life as a dancer took its course naturally. She discovered dance at age 4 after her parents placed her in a studio, where she learned tap, jazz and ballet throughout high school. She also began teaching young children at the studio, which she called a "rite of passage" for veteran studio dancers, while also participating in her school's "pom pom" team.

When she went away to the University of Illinois, Ebert said she majored in dance because of her interest in the art form and a lack of interest in other subjects. She completed a bachelor of fine arts in the university's modern

dance program, which she said demanded hard work and long hours.

"Undergrad was sort of a blur," she said. "I was in the studio all the time. I was in a sorority, I suppose, but since I was never there it was like I wasn't really in one."

After Ebert received her degree in 1998, she went to Chicago and put her craft to work. She did what she calls "pick-up" dance work, taking on different projects with various dance companies while keeping her job as a makeup artist. Ebert said her dance career is a result of a constant progression rather than a turning point or realization.

"(Dance) has always been a part of my life," she said. "There was never one moment where it clicked. It's just how I express myself, through movement."

Three years out of college, Ebert decided to move out West and return to the classroom — or in this case, the studio. She said being a graduate student and graduate teaching fellow here at the University is "a number of full-time jobs at once." Her responsibilities include teaching four lower division technique classes per term, taking advanced technique and academic classes and rehearsing for creative projects outside of class.

Ebert said all her energy is devoted to the graduate program.

"It is so physically, mentally and emotionally challenging," she said. "I put all of myself into my art form, and I use the same energies in every aspect of my life."

Besides following a motivation to learn, Ebert followed her heart to Oregon. She had been dating current University Department of Dance music director and Professor Christian Cherry in Illinois when he was hired at the University. After Ebert investigated the University's dance program, they decided to make the move together.

Now, after a seven-year relationship, Ebert and Cherry have a Portland wedding planned for July.

As a farewell to the University dance department, Ebert will perform as "the champion of the dancer," as she calls herself, in "Dance Gallery." The concert, which is part of Ebert's final project as a graduate student, will show three modern pieces by choreographers Linda K. Johnson and Mary Oslund. This year's graduate dance students were required to complete a written research component as well as a component involving movement.

"So many people place emphasis on choreographers," Ebert said. "What I have to do as a dancer is find ways to express the choreographers' ideas. I'm interested in how dancers do that."

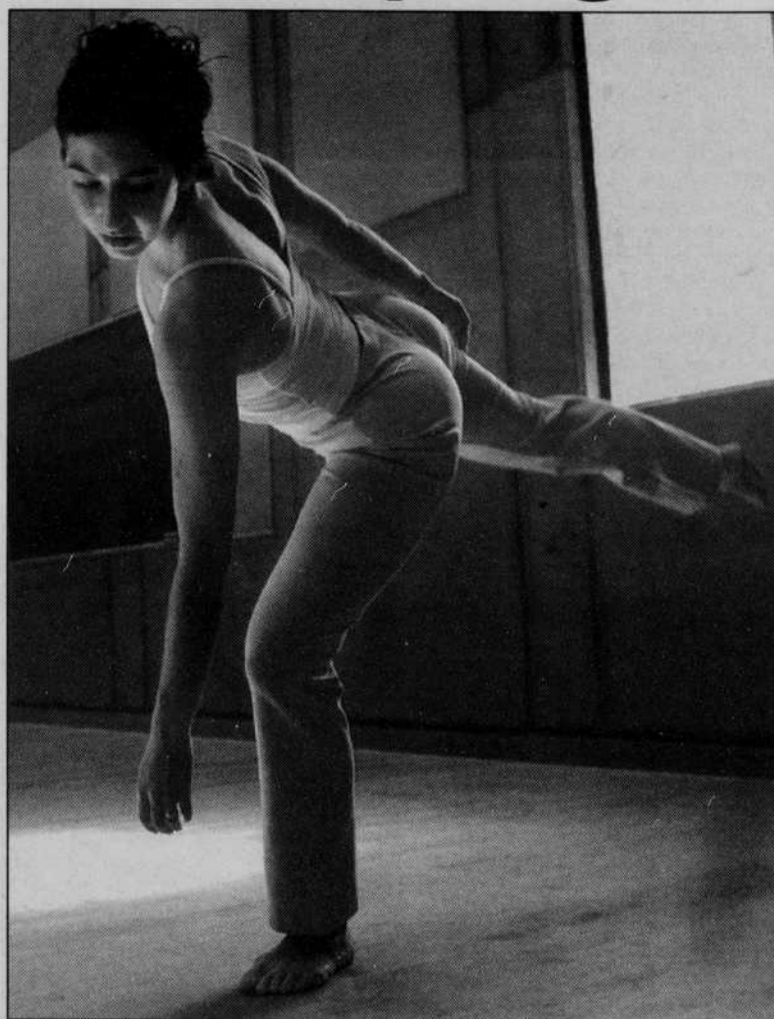
Dance professor Walter Kennedy said her upcoming concert reflects one of the many ways she has expressed her interest in performing during her time at the University.

"For her thesis project, she sought out the different ways that dancers express choreography," Kennedy said. "(Emphasizing the importance of the dancer) is a valid point — the dancer is the one doing the dancing."

Ebert said she is "in a good place right now" as she sets off into her next professional dance job, which she didn't even have to audition for. Minh Tran invited Ebert to dance with his company after he watched her in class during a recent visit to the University. When she starts working with Tran, Ebert plans to split her time between Portland and Springfield, where she and Cherry currently live.

Dance department chair Jenifer Craig, who also is the chair of Ebert's final MFA project committee, said she is sure Ebert will make a great contribution to Minh Tran & Company.

"She is stunning on stage," Craig said. "She's demonstrated a high level of focus on becoming a performer at



Danielle Hickey Photo Editor

Sarah Ebert, an MFA dance student, will join two other choreographers for "Dance Gallery" in the Gerlinger Annex on Saturday night.

the professional level. That should be evident in her MFA evening — it's all solo work."

As a performer, Ebert's goal is not to become a big star, but to continue as an important communicator of dance.

"(Dance) isn't about being in the spotlight," she said. "It's about bringing the piece of art to life. Whether or not that happens in front of an

audience is irrelevant."

"Dance Gallery" will take place at 8 p.m. on the third floor of the Gerlinger Annex; Ebert will perform progressively, with each dance in a different space. Tickets will be on sale at the door for \$5.

Contact the Pulse reporter at natashachilingirian@dailyemerald.com.

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