

In the company of professionals

Repertory Dance shares art form with community

BY NATASHA CHILINGERIAN
SENIOR PULSE REPORTER

The Department of Dance prepares budding dancers for possible careers in the art by offering classes, producing concerts and hosting guest instructors. But one group within the department gives dancers a nearly authentic taste of the real world — the University of Oregon Repertory Dance Company.

Currently in its seventh year, the Dance Company has two main purposes: to give students a sense of being in a professional touring company and to share dance with Oregon communities through outreach programs.

"Students can have an experience that is as close to a professional touring company as they can," Dance Department Chair Jenifer Craig said. Craig, along with dance faculty members Rita Honka and Amy Stoddart, directs the company. "The other part is students can get out in the community and bring the experience to schools for people who don't see that much dance."

The group is beginning rehearsals this term after a lengthy audition process in the fall. To qualify, members must have good academic standing and do not need to physically audition if the directors are familiar with their dancing through classes.

The group's season kicked off with a surprise guest artist visit from Barry McNabb, a University alumnus who started his dance career as a member of Bob Fosse's "Dancin'" in New York City. McNabb spent the first week of this term teaching Dance Company members three funky, "Fosse-style" jazz dances to Nat King Cole's "Route 66," "Stardust" and "Something Makes Me Want to Dance With You." They will perform part of the three-dance suite at "Lights, Camera, Oregon!" a formal, invitation-only fundraiser for Campaign Oregon: Transforming Lives, on Jan. 29 in the Moshofsky Sports Center.

"(Lights, Camera, Oregon!) is a really exciting opportunity to showcase the department through our company," Craig said.

During the term, Dance Company members will learn and rehearse



LAUREN WIMER | SENIOR PHOTOGRAPHER

Rachel Carroll rehearses with the University Repertory Dance Company, a group in the Department of Dance, which will tour several cities in Oregon.

material for their five-day tour March 31 through April 4 in Newport, Astoria and Cannon Beach. Dancers will perform as well as lead lecture-demonstrations and technique classes to novice dancers in high school drama and physical education classes. Dance Company members and graduate dance students Marco Davis and Lowry Champion said the high school visits are a great way to bring dance into schools that have suffered from budget cuts in the arts.

"I joined (the company) to do some outreach," Lowry said. "I enjoy teaching at the college level, but it's good to go beyond that and teach young people who may not have dance in their lives or who may not have been exposed to dance."

Following its tour, the company will appear at Springfield High School on April 22, the Dougherty Dance Theatre on April 28 and 29, and at Cottage Grove's Cottage Theatre on May 13.

While the group's dancers have different career goals, Craig said they "all

want to be part of the dance world in some way" after graduating and that participation in the company prepares them for dance-related careers by giving them a taste of the professional world. For instance, rehearsals are fast-paced and dancers learn material in a short period of time. On tour, dancers are expected to help out with details such as costuming.

"UORDC is great because you get to go out and teach and be an educator," Davis said. "Also, the directors provide us with a strong sense of a touring company. We're treated as professionals."

Champion said her experience has helped her understand the inner workings of an outreach-based dance company.

"For me, I've learned the ins and outs of an outreach program, and I can see how to plan tours," she said. "I have a broader sense of understanding how that works beyond just attending rehearsals and teaching classes."

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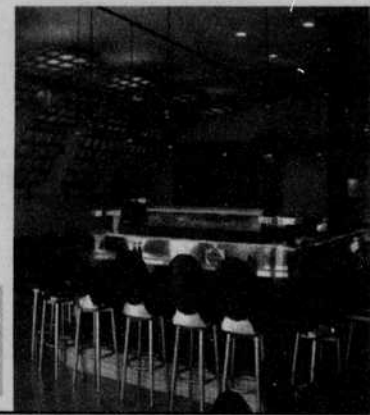
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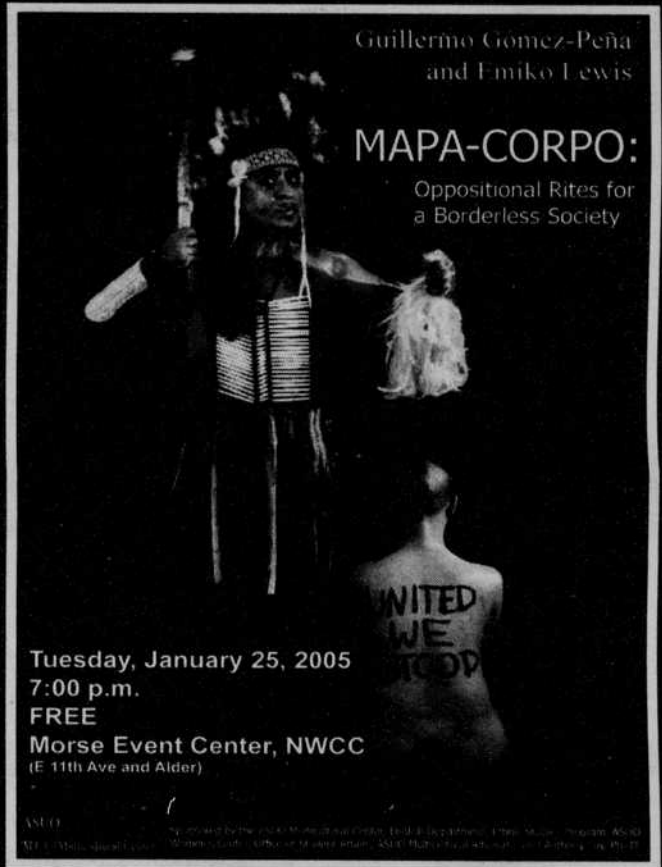
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