



BLAINE TRUITT/COVER

Oregon Ballet Theatre founding artistic director James Canfield rehearses with dancer Alison Roper.

ing dances of his own, Canfield helped continue the development of Portland's audience for new contemporary work.

### *Rising from the Ashes*

Funding is an ever-present concern for U.S. arts organizations, and Portland was not immune. In 1990, Ballot Measure 5 limited the amount of property taxes that could be dedicated to school funding. By 1994, PSU's dance program had folded.

It was a blow to the dance community, but not a fatal one.

"There was a bit of a feeling of gloom and doom, but there were enough of us that still had enough energy in us to keep it up," says Bielemeier, who taught at PSU during the dance program's final years.

In 1995, Linda K. Johnson and Oslund formed Conduit, an organization aimed at supporting the work of six core artists. All of them had their own aesthetic, but Oslund believes the mix worked well: "I think it had a very healthy way of encouraging us to be close to each other as colleagues and also be very different as artists."

Also in 1995, Kristy Edmunds founded the Portland Institute for Contemporary Art. In addition, the Dance Cartel had recently started helping emerging choreographers develop and produce work.

In 1997, Tran launched Minh Tran & Company and BodyVox sprang into existence in answer to a commission from Portland Opera.

That same year, Paul King and Walter Jaffe started White Bird, a presenting organization that filled the hole left by the discontinuation of PSU's program. The two founders acknowledge that the loyal audience White Bird enjoys today is due, in part, to the programs that came before.

### *Today's Landscape*

"This is a very rich city as far as instruction, as far as inspiration for making work, as far as an accepting, enthusiastic audience," Oslund says.

Since 1996, no less than 20 dance groups have emerged, most of which still exist. At least nine companies have popped up in the past five years alone. Jaffe and King call it a "dance explosion."

Some of the groups (Skinner/Kirk Dance

Ensemble, Ten Tiny Dances, Bouand DanceCompany) were founded by longtime Portland dance professionals in pursuit of new projects and collaborations.

Others (POV Dance, Teeth, KO&Co.) were started by relative newcomers who see the city as a good place to put down roots. And there are more potential transplants where those came from: Jaffe says White Bird often receives inquiries from dance artists considering relocating to the Rose City.

Portland audiences' appetite for dance has continued to develop, as well, until it exceeds or rivals that of many other cities. For example, when White Bird presented Finnish choreographer Tero Saarinen here in October, the performance drew a crowd of 1,800. His other U.S. engagement, in Albuquerque, N.M., had an audience of 300.

Despite the abundance of choreographers, dancers and a supportive audience, Portland's dance community still faces challenges—primarily economic ones.

Because funding is hard to come by, artists have to "make a lot happen for very little," says Canfield, who continued to work in Portland until becoming Nevada Ballet Theatre's interim artistic director this year.

Companies' artistic directors wear so many hats that they are left with little time to focus on their creative sides. Bielemeier, who had a company for about four years, says, "You have to be an artistic director, a creator, deal with the board of directors, deal with fund raising—you have to deal with every aspect."

To ensure enough income to survive, many movement artists hold full- or part-time jobs. Some work in arts administration or teach dance, whereas others take on jobs in completely different fields. Choreographer/producer Mike Barber is a public school teacher, Tran manages the books for his partner's property management business, Bielemeier co-owns a home organization service.

"The biggest challenge for movement artists is how to keep your survival/basic income going [while still] finding the time to make work," says Oslund.

The local dance community is understandably nervous about the impact that the nation's economic woes will have on funding for the arts. According to Oslund, most arts organizations are just like consumers, in debt over their heads.

Canfield, who is also familiar with the challenges of running a company, cautions dance artists to not "be excessive in your dreams and your vision." He says, "If it's not running successfully financially and artistically, where is its longevity?"

Although it is a handicap, financial uncertainty is nothing new for professional artists. There is hope in the fact that dancers are a resilient bunch, as history has shown.

As Bielemeier puts it: "You cannot fund artists, but we're not going to go away. We're here, like it or not." **10**



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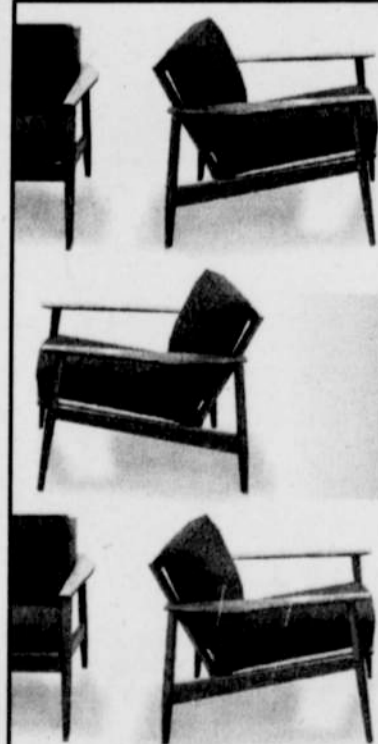
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