

## New dance company looks forward to performing outdoors or in office buildings

By KC Cowan  
The Southwest Portland Post

Does Portland need another dance company? Kimberley Allen and Kemba Shannon think so. They held open auditions in November for spots in Bremóné Dance, which they hope to build into a professional dance company.

If they succeed, it will be very different from what most audiences experience at a dance performance. For one thing, Allen said, there might not be a stage.

"I think the stage is a restriction and you can't get out of it what you want," explained Allen.

"The dancers are supposed to be moving in as many ways as you can think of, and if you're given a stage to move on and it's a rectangle, you only have that amount of space to move on."

Instead, Allen wants Bremóné Dance to perform outdoors, or in office buildings, using dance to tell stories about a business – what it does and its history.

"The dynamics of a building or a landscape is very dynamic and offers so much more for the inventive mind," Allen said. "So, we're not restricting ourselves in any way."

Allen was a competitive gymnast, but dance was always a part of her life. She was taking classes from Kemba Shannon at the Fulton Center when

Shannon shared her dream of forming a company.

Shannon needed a partner and asked Allen to join her dream. The two women have spent the last year working out a business plan and goals for the company.

Shannon currently teaches four dance classes a week at the Fulton Center and the hope is that as the classes grow, money from that will pay the dancers.

"Our goal is to



Kemba Shannon teaches prospective company members a dance routine.  
(Post photo by KC Cowan)

really pay dancers well, because dancers usually don't get paid well," said Allen.

At the auditions, no one was asked how much dance experience they had. Nor were they scrutinized for having (or not having) a "dancer's body," *per se*. Shannon is more interested in finding people who move well and truly want to be part of a dance family.

"We're looking for different talents. People who want to come in as a community and be creative. What we're really looking for is personality."

Allen agreed. "I hope to move people up through the classes into the company as they can. You can tell when people have that passion."

At the November audition, where 14 women and two men showed up, it was easy to tell who had dance training by the extension of a foot or hand, or their posture.

After an extensive warm-up, Shannon began to teach a difficult, short routine. While percussionist Rob Smith kept the beat, Shannon went over and over the steps. Some caught on more quickly than others.

Then Shannon had the prospects dance across the room in small groups to see how they move, before turning them over to Susan Strauss, who taught them movements to a short poem she recited.

The more simple moves gave those who haven't had much dance training an opportunity to shine. Allen and Shannon say they are looking for that special spark of energy and personality – performers who are as much actors as dancers.

"I am looking for people that can move. I can coach everything else," said Shannon.

"We're open. We're really trying to form a core company. We're focused on the community, and finding people who are long-term committed," added Allen.

"We don't want it to be only dancers. We want it to also be people who don't necessarily think of themselves as a dancer."

After learning all the routines, each dancer was called forward individually to perform Shannon's dance, the word/movement piece and then was given a prop, such as a telephone, and asked to improvise a movement piece around that.

Allen, Shannon and three other guest judges will decide who ultimately makes the cut. Judging doesn't come easily to Shannon. "This part is hard because I feel like I could work with anybody."

Bremóné Dance hopes to land 10 solid dancer/performers for a start. They'll hold another audition in the spring.

In the meantime, the company will hold an open house on Dec. 12 at the Fulton Park Community Center (68 SW Miles Street) so people can get a taste of the unique style of Portland's latest dance company.



Kemba Shannon and Kimberley Allen spent a year planning before they held auditions for their new dance company.  
(Post photo by KC Cowan)



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