OBSERVATIONS

FROM THE SIDELINES

by Kathryn Hall Bogle

The Northwest Afrikan American Ballet, the first traditional African dance company of its kind in the Northwest, will be led by its creator, Master Drummer Bruce Smith, when it opens at Jefferson High School auditorium on Saturday evening, June 11.

The company, whose sponsors are the Metropolitan Arts Commission and the Northwest Artists Workshop, consists of 16 young dancers all invited by Smith to join him in learning the traditional dances of Africa.

"Some of the dancers came from Jefferson's dance department, others came from the community," Smith said. "My drive was to bring a sense of culturism to the Northwest. Very few people," he went on, "realize that the dances they do at parties have been done for a thousand years in the different regions throughout the continent of Africa. We pay respect to these purely traditional dances when we perform.

"Why do we call it Ballet? The word 'ballet' means, 'a dance that tells a story.' However, there is no 'point' in our performance, no ballet slippers nor a tu-tu. We do the social dances of Africa — dances that we black Americans lost when we were taken in slavery and were disconnected by the system from our past. We are getting in touch again this way. We do dances that were performed at weddings, dances of planting, of harvesting and other work days, dances of jubilance, welcoming, and for the recognition of young manhood."

How and why did this native Portlander build this dream into reality? He said he had started with a fascination with hand drums he heard played in jazz concerts recorded by Herbie Hancock, Miles Davis and others. His father, Cleophas, owned a substantial collection of records, Smith said. "My father had records of the great. I heard a lot of Dizzy Gillespie when I was a boy. My father had *all* of Gillespie's records.

"I learned a lot from these records when I was growing up and practicing on my own. At age 19, I had my first drum lesson. It was Cal Jader whom I cornered in his hotel after a Portland concert. I begged him for a lesson and offered him all the money I had — $10.00 — to pay for it. He gave me the lesson and pocketed my ten.

"At Lewis and Clark College, I had classes in art and design, but I still wanted to be a percussionist.

"At Jefferson, as students, we had a little group that we called the 'Soul Masters.' We had put on a performance in the auditorium for the school and we called it the 'Soul Assembly.' We wanted to establish as much understanding between the races as we could through music and speeches to counteract some of the attitudes dividing the school and community in the days following the assassination of Martin Luther King.

"Afterwards, the Soul Masters stuck together and we played at churches and at nightclubs and anywhere. There were Janice Poe, Greg Talton, Donald Hepburn, Charles Hunter and several others who became involved as we grew busier. We added horns and linked ourselves with programs at Mt. Hood Community College.

"In 1972," Smith reminisced, "B.B. King came to town and we opened his show at the Paramount. We were impressed with our opportunity and we decided to tighten and streamline our act. We became nine members and called ourselves 'Pleasure.'

"For several years 'Pleasure' toured around the nation and I, still with the hand drums, met hand drummers from Puerto Rico, Cuba and South America. Knowing that Africa had been the real heritage of these drummers, I knew that to go to Africa was the ultimate for me. Then I met Obo Addy, the master drummer from Africa, and I knew that to become a master drummer was the other half of the dream.

"I went to Africa in 1981. To Senegal.

"I went to study dance and music and I learned the culture, the stories and how to make the djembe (pronounced 'jimbay') the hand drums of Mali, Guinea, and Senegal. The djembe is made of hardwood, is shaped like a funnel and is topped with the thin skin of a baby goat or an antelope to give it a high-pitched sound. Other tones are achieved by using different woods and different thicknesses of skins.

"All of the drums we use in our performance were made by me. The garments were made by my wife, Chonitia, from fabric that came from Senegal and New York City. I learned tie-dye techniques in Senegal as part of my research and we tie-dyed the fabrics for these garments at my house.

"For the performance," Smith promised in conclusion, "we will be playing some of the incredible polyrhythms I heard in Africa. African drumming is spiritual — the spiritual expressions of ancient African life. We will present it to Northwest America — our Northwest Afrikan American Ballet.

"Don't forget," Smith ended, "Curtain time is 8:00 p.m."

Northwest Afrikan American Ballet: Tracy Sanders, Bruce Smith. (Photo by Richard J. Brown)

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Rumors of CIA action persist

Part II

by Robert Lothian

News of a possible connection between McMinnville-based Evergreen Helicopters, Inc. and the CIA surfaced in 1975, when Evergreen bought Intermountain Aviation from the CIA.

Intermountain, headquartered at a 2,200 acre former military training base near Tucson, had been one of several "proprietary" commercial air operations around the world which the CIA grouped under the title Air America. Its covert activities included flying anti-communist Tibetan guerrillas to their homeland, and delivering unmarked B-26 bombers to Africa (*Wall Street Journal*, Feb. 18, 1979). Intermountain's facilities included sophisticated parachute technology for dropping people and bundles into remote areas.

An airfield, maintenance and test area, several airplanes, and "convention-seminar" faciilties were sold to Evergreen. One of the uses Evergreen has for its Arizona base is storage of "vintage aircraft" in the dry desert climate.

In 1979, the *Wall Street Journal* uncovered a lucrative auto parts hauling scam being conducted by the CIA through Intermountain and Southern Air Transport. Southern Air, another branch of Air America, was "a key arm for covert operations in the Caribbean," according to the article (*Wall Street Journal*, Feb. 18, 1979).

A major part of the two airlines' business in the '60s and early '70s was transportation of millions of dollars worth of auto parts for big three automakers. The operation yielded profits for the CIA, which set up a Detroit bureau to oversee the shipments.

The ostensibly legitimate business provided the airline's commercial cover "when the planes weren't needed for clandestine operations abroad, such as dropping supplies by parachute in remote jungles," according to the article.

Former CIA director William Colby is quoted as saying, "If you're doing some kind of legitimate business, you stick out too much, like a sore thumb."

When news of the CIA's proprietary activities began to leak out, the agency sold Southern Air in 1973 and Intermountain in 1975. Southern was sold to the man who had managed it for the CIA for 11 years, and Evergreen retained some personnel who had worked for Intermountain under CIA management.

Another company, Rosenbalm Aviation of Medford, Oregon, bought several of Intermountain's airplanes and other equipment. According to the *Wall Street Journal*, two of Rosenbalm's top managers have strong CIA connections. One had worked at Intermountain for six years, then transferred to Rosenbalm in 1973, the same year Rosenbalm bought four planes from Intermountain. Evergreen and Rosenbalm continued to haul auto parts after the CIA divested itself of Intermountain, "inviting suspicion that the CIA intends to remain in the business," says the *Wall Street Journal*.

A Senate Select Intelligence Committee Report quoted in the article states: "In several cases, transfer of the entity was conditioned as an agreement that the proprietary would continue to provide goods or services to the CIA." Ominously, the CIA classified as secret a General Accounting Office Report on the sale of Intermountain to Evergreen (*Wall Street Journal*, Feb. 18, 1979).

Under Evergreen ownership, the Arizona site became headquarters for what the *Wall Street Journal* called "the nation's fastest growing supplemental airline," Evergreen International Airlines, Inc., a subsidiary of Evergreen Helicopters.

In 1979, Evergreen International relocated to Oregon with the help of an Oregon Economic Development Commission $1 million bond to help with construction. From McMinnville, Evergreen International's 130 member staff controls world-wide flight operations. Its business between major U.S. cities and Europe, Puerto Rico and three cities on the Yucatan Peninsula consists of 60% cargo and 40% passengers.

The Evergreen-CIA connection heated up again in 1980 when Evergreen International flew the deposed Shah of Iran from Panama to Egypt. Television commentators and the *Wall Street Journal* reported that the Shah was flown on a CIA jet.

Evergreen made news again in 1980 when a 16-year-old employee of the company died in a forklift accident in McMinnville in September of that year. The Oregon Wage and Hour Commission later charged Evergreen with employing the youth beyond his capacity at a hazardous job, and with failing to obtain required youth employment certificates. After resisting, the company finally agreed to abide by the commission's ruling that it could hire youths under 17 for office work only (*Oregonian*, May 29, 1981; July 22, 1981).

At about the same time, Evergreen fired 23 workers involved in a Machinists' Union organizing drive at its McMinnville facilities. The Justice Dept. later sought an injunction against the company for interfering with employees' legitimate right to organize. Sixteen of the fired employees were later awarded $58,000 in a settlement which allowed Evergreen not to admit to any wrongdoing (*Oregonian*, Jan. 22, 1982).

Evergreen's spray operations have long involved the company in controversy. In 1971, for instance, the company was slapped with a suit charging that one of its copters mistakenly sprayed the home of a Clark County, Washington family with herbicide 2,4-D. The suit was denied, but not before the family claimed a variety of medical problems (*Oregonian*, May 6, 1981).

During the summer of 1981, one of Evergreen's helicopters was hit by gunfire as it sprayed the insecticide malathion over a 257 square mile area of Santa Clara County, California infested with the Mediterranean fruit fly. (*Oregonian*, July 30, 1981). In the spring of 1982, another Evergreen helicopter mistakenly doused an 11 block strip of Salem homes with a cloud of the insecticide sevin during a campaign against the gypsy moth (*Oregonian*, May 22, 1982).

Home-grown Evergreen is involved in some heavy activity. A call to the Agency for International Development in Washington failed to uncover Evergreen AID contracts other than their current power line repair project in El Salvador. But AID does not disclose contracts that involve intelligence or national security. We may hear more about Evergreen's international operations in the future.

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