

ETSU dancers take risks, fly high

Spring concert offers mix of styles, choreographers, emotions

Agile, athletic dancers in a rainbow of colors and shapes glide, bob, leap, roll, slide and twirl on – and soar above – the black Bud Frank Theatre stage, preparing for the long weekend ahead when ETSU’s Division of Theatre and Dance presents a variety of styles and steps in its second Spring Dance Concert through Sunday (March 1).

There’s nothing predictable in this program of 28 performers and eight dances that include ballroom dance, low-lying aerial trapeze, jazz and modern genres, says Cara Harker, assistant professor of dance in the division. “The dancers have been really open to trying new things, so it’s allowed me to take risks,” she said.

If “variety is the spice of life,” it is making this concert extra-spicy, according to ETSU dance instructor Jennifer Kintner. “Cara and I talked about unification in the concert,” she said. “We do not have an



overarching theme, but what we hope is that people will enjoy the variety and high technical standards we are trying to maintain.” Putting a theme on a concert limits the choreographers, Harker believes. “By telling them, ‘Okay, say whatever you want to say,’ it gives them the freedom to explore,” she said. “I hope the audience will enjoy taking the various journeys with the dancers.”

On Harker’s list of risks in this eclectic program are two pieces choreographed by ETSU students, but the step of faith has found sure footing with Everett Tarlton and Kari Parkey.

“The student choreographers have been great,” says Harker. “I’m impressed with how much time and effort they have put into making their pieces work.”

Even more daring is the first aerial dance number by ETSU performers – Harker, Rebekah Shibao and Garryn Howard. “The three of us have had the best time ‘playing’ on the trapeze,” Harker said.

Ambitions are also high-flying in “Far Flung,” choreographed by Kintner, who teaches “Dance as Human Experience” at ETSU and stepped in as Mountain Movers dance troupe director upon the retirement of longtime ETSU dance faculty member and Mountain Movers founder Judy Woodruff.

The piece, like several others, features a mix of dance company performers and dancers from ETSU classes. Twelve bare feet make soft sounds on the floor as cello music ebbs and swells and Kintner watches her “Far Flung” choreography evolve.

“A little brighter, Micah,” she instructs. “Nice Chelsey ... Woo! What that lip is doing ... Perfect! Make it big, guys, if you can.”

Harker had at least twice as many feet to choreograph for her “Sinner Man” – a daunting task.

“I like the challenge of having a large group packed on the stage performing synchronous movement,” she says. “When it works, it is fantastic, but when one person is just a second off-step, it’s really noticeable. So they are working tirelessly to achieve perfect unison.”

The last piece in the show is also modern and was choreographed by Woodruff. “Catch” seems to be the favorite of almost all the performers and teachers in the show.



“I think everyone is satisfied with it being the ending,” says Mountain Movers member and ETSU junior Chelsey Price. “We have been working on it for a long time. It’s our tribute to Judy.”

Not only is it meaningful to the dancers, Harker says, but the piece should be fun for the viewers, as well. “It has such a great sense of playfulness, and it communicates the joy of dance wonderfully.”

The hundreds of hours of effort and strained muscles may not always produce joy for the dancers, but there seem to be no complaints from this group.

“I spend about six to eight hours a week for the one dance,” said 19-year-old Katie Sanders. “It is completely worth it. Sometimes it gets hard and we get worn out, but dance is part of who I am. It is a passion that will never leave.”

The unique opportunity for expression and sharing a message with the audience compels 21-year-old senior Louie Herman. “To truly dance you lose yourself within the rhythm of the music,” he said. “Seven to 10 hours of practice does not seem like a dreadful obligation when you see it as stretching

your body, expanding your experiences and expressing your soul.”

With the variety of styles, colors, levels, dancers and choreographers, there should be a dance to “get lost in” for most everyone, Kintner said. “I really wish folks would just come and have a good time. They’ll leave with their own toes tapping!”

Performances are at 7:30 p.m. today through Saturday and 2 p.m. Sunday in Bud Frank Theatre, located on the ground floor of Gilbreath Hall. Admission is \$15 for adults and \$7 for students.

For tickets or more information, call the Division of Theatre and Dance box office at 439-7576 or 439-6511.

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