

Trio kicks up its heels

By PAULETTE PEIROL

Waiting for Toronto "talent scouts" to seek out promising artists from York is much like waiting for Godot, according to many Fine Arts students.

The situation is rendered even more problematic for performing arts students, whose only large venue on campus is the inhospitable Burton Auditorium.

Until York decides to either renovate the degenerating theatre or build a new one, students have little recourse but to take their shows into the fertile yet competitive breeding ground of downtown Toronto.

Yet graduating students Lisa Hopkins, Kerri Weir, and Yvonne Ng, founders of the new, York-based Dance Allegro, are nothing less than optimistic about the company's upcoming performance at the Winchester Street Theatre.

The 11 York students (plus alumna Rose Williams) chosen for Friday and Saturday's performances are "competent, capable dancers, who'll give us 100 percent effort, and then some," says Weir. "The only difference between them and alumni is experience."

Professionalism tops the list of priorities for this young modern dance troupe, who drafted a budget long before the project was approved by the Fine Arts faculty. Cutting through red tape and attending to administrative duties has in fact swallowed much of the trio's time, proving that artistic talent alone is insufficient to create a bona fide company.

Dance Allegro is a testament to not only its members' talent and integrity, but also their endurance.

Hopkins, Weir and Ng all come from diverse backgrounds. But they share in common the affirmative drive to bridge the gap between the sheltered world of dance academia and professional, critical exposure.

While all three students have studied primarily modern dance at York, none of them considered themselves modern dancers prior to attending university.

Hopkins, co-artistic director of Dance Allegro, first gained ground as an accomplished jazz and tap

dancer, and as a choreographer for musical theatre. She came to York only after winning an entrance scholarship four years ago. "I left jazz dancing at the doorstep when I came (here)," she says.

Last year, Hopkins was the first recipient of "The Dean's Prize for Excellence," awarded for her achievement in dance at York.

Weir, who is also artistic co-director of Dance Allegro, finished high school early in Quebec's accelerated education system. Merely 17 years old, the classically trained dancer was accepted into York's Fine Arts program.

Weir's added talents in visual art have extended her focus to encompass imagistic themes in her choreography.

While Ng's classical ballet training echos that of Weir's, her experience is derived from a different cultural context—that of Singapore, her homeland. Since her father was opposed to the idea of her becoming a professional dancer, Ng came to Canada under the pretense of studying hotel and restaurant management at Ryerson. That soon changed, however, upon her acceptance into York's dance program.

Ng's sharp yet lyrical style, plus her capacity to internalize almost any conceptual idea, has made her a frequently sought dancer for independent choreographers. Ng is the featured dancer of both Weir and Hopkins' choreography in Dance Allegro's upcoming performance.

Of the seven original pieces in the show, four are premieres. Hopkins' *Aftertones*, the oldest work, was first performed last spring in the dance department's "Highlights" show. Both *Grasping Force* (by Weir) and *Skid* (by Hopkins) were showcased in "Spring Dance '87" at Premiere Dance theatre earlier in March. New works include *No Fear, No Hate* (Weir), *And We All Fall Down* (Hopkins), *What it is* (Weir), and *Images in Passing* (Ng and Weir).

The program, true to the company's namesake is spirited and lively. The pieces are a far cry from the cerebral manifestos so prevalent in older forms of modern dance.

"We're not academic dancers, just because we work in a university atmosphere," Weir contends. "The

dance program (at York) is well-rounded, and we've used this to our advantage."

In an odd way, the pessimism of some York faculty members encountered by Dance Allegro has formed part of the impetus of the economy. Hopkins notes that many professors were worried that the dance department's reputation would be at risk through exposure to downtown audiences. "Yet you need these skeptics to keep you on guard," she says.

The two choreographers were told last summer that instead of forming the company through an independent studies course, they must enlist in a fourth year choreographic workshop. Fortunately, not enough studies signed up for the workshop and their program was eventually granted its independent study status, with Artist-in-Residence Juan Antonio as advisor.

Next in the spool of red tape to unravel before the entrepreneurs was the inevitable question of funding. Dance Allegro soon realized that to gain college funding it had to become a club, which it did under the name of "Independance."

The company's initial budget of \$1,500 was eventually fulfilled by donations from college councils, the Co-Curricular Committee of College Masters, the Dean of Fine Arts (Joyce Zemans), and by the Dance Students Association. T-shirts, designed by Weir, were also sold to gain revenue.

Dance Allegro also acknowledges the continued moral support of the dance department's Performance Committee, comprised of Department Chairman Keith Urban and faculty members Patricia Fraser and Gail Benn.

In anticipation of Dance Allegro's success, the company booked the Winchester Street theatre before the show was even choreographed. To provide a post-dated deposit cheque for the theatre, the company opened a chequing account with a total initial balance of \$3, each dancer contributing a buck.

In terms of administrative duties, "we became like a well-oiled machine," Hopkins said. Weir designed all the necessary artwork, Hopkins took care of writing proposals and promotion material, and Ng oversaw all aspects of production.

"Our styles blend well together," Hopkins says. "We're all coming from the same place and growing at the same pace." If all goes well, the company intends to become a registered non-profit organization next year and will apply for an Ontario Arts Council grant.

As the for "Independance" club the trio hopes it will set a precedent and continue to function as an avenue for graduating dance students interested in performing independently.

Dance Allegro is "proud to be from York," acknowledges Hopkins. "But we're too proud not to take credit for our individual work," she concludes.

Those attending Friday night's

performance are invited to meet Weir, Hopkins and Ng, plus the other 12 dancers involved in the show at an open reception following the show. Tickets are \$6 for students/seniors; \$8 for adults. For more information call either Yvonne Ng (665-1024) or Lisa Hopkins (889-8488).

Kerri Weir, co-artistic director of Dance Allegro, as seen in her solo piece, **No Fear, No Hate**. Weir will be joined by co-founders Lisa Hopkins and Yvonne Ng in performance Friday and Saturday.

Photos By BABAK AMIRFEIZ



YORK ARTS CALENDAR

Compiled by JENNIFER PARSONS

GALLERIES

Janet Cardiff, recent prints by the artist. Glendon Gallery, Feb. 26-March 29.

Pop/Op Multiplied, pop and op selections from the Gallery's permanent collection. AGYU (N145 Ross), Feb. 26 to March 27.

Nancy Hayelgrove, a show featuring big, bright and color-themed acrylics on canvas. Zacks Gallery (109 Stong College), March 25 to April 10.

Louise Levergneux, oil paintings and multimedia by the artist. La Maison Du Culture (Glendon Hall), March 11 to 27.

Tending the fire, sculptures by Gail Esau. Winters Gallery (123 Winters College), March 16 to 29.

Area Show Series, this week's show features the work of the Design Dept. IDA Gallery (102 Fine Arts Bldg), March 23-27.

MUSIC

Student Recitals, Susan Watt, piano; Rick Calich, trumpet. McLaughlin Hall, March 19 at 7 p.m.

Rayo Taxi, Radio York presents the Toronto band, at the Open End Pub. Vanier College, March 19.

Piano Recital, a concert by the piano students of the Music Dept. McLaughlin Hall, March 20 at 12 noon.

Student Recitals, Nancy Berman, piano; Tim Woodger, percussion; Eric Chow, piano. McLaughlin Hall, March 24 at 3 p.m.

Student Recital, Gordon Simpson, bassoon. McLaughlin Hall, March 24 at 7 p.m.

Jazz Orchestra Concert, directed by Prof. David Mott. Cash bar. Winters Senior Common Room, March 24 at 8 p.m.

CJRT Soloists Series, a concert with the Purcell String Quartet of Vancouver. McLaughlin Hall, March 25 at 12:30 p.m.

York University Chamber Choir Concert, under the direction of Albert Greer. McLaughlin Hall, March 25 at 4 p.m.

THEATRE

A Man's A Man, an independent production of the Bertolt Brecht play. Directed by Soheil Parsa with original music by Colin Campbell and Andy Stochansky of Partical Zoo. Samuel Beckett Theatre (Stong College), March 25-28. For more information phone 736-7236.

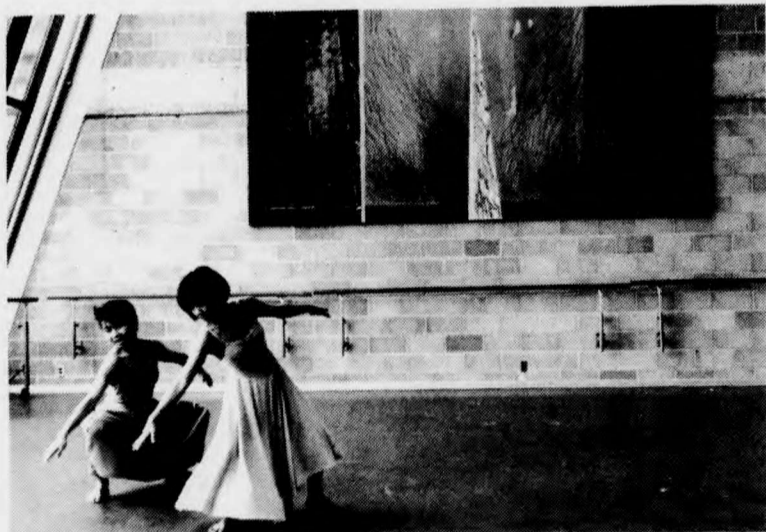
GUEST LECTURES

The Public Funding of Artists. How to Apply for a Grant, a one-hour talk with Nancy Hushion, Visual Arts Officer. Ontario Arts Council. Room 312 Find Arts, March 20 at 12 noon.

Prime Time, with guest speaker Moses Znaimer, President of CITY-TV. Atkinson Theatre, March 20 from 12:30 to 2 p.m.

DANCE

Dance Allegro, a division of Independance, presents new works in modern dance, choreographed by York students Lisa Hopkins and Kerri Weir. March 20, 21 at 8 p.m. \$8.00 for adults, \$6.00 for seniors and students. Winchester St. Theatre, 80 Winchester St. For more information call 665-1024 or 889-8488.



Rose Williams and Yvonne Ng

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