

# Oh joy, oh bliss

BY TIM COVERT

**P**ENELOPE Evans has danced and choreographed in England, the United States, and even Thailand. She has been the head of the Contemporary Jazz Department at Halifax Dance for many years and has been involved with the organization since before its inception. So where does she get the energy to work six months on the annual Jazz Bliss show, taking place next Friday and Saturday in the McInnes Room of the Dalhousie Student Union Building?

"The fact that the project takes so much time, on the parts of so many committed individuals, is offset by the results produced," said Evans. "The performers are elated by their artistic expressions and performances, and bottom line — it raises money for a worthy cause that we all believe in."

The cause Evans is raising funds for is the Bliss Scholarship Fund after which the show is named. Established in 1993 by Halifax Dance, the fund is used to support the training of young dancers in need of financial assistance. The fund is named in honour of Sally Brayley-Bliss, a prominent figure in the North American Dance community who is also a consultant and honorary patron of the Halifax

Young Dance Company. Half the proceeds from this year's Jazz Bliss will go to the Bliss Scholarship Fund while the rest will go to regular Halifax Dance Association fundraising.

Asked about support for dance in Halifax, Evans stated that, "it all boils down to population base. How many people go to a football game...a hockey game...a basketball game? Now look at how many people go to art, to the theatre...symphony...modern dance. You might as well just move the decimal point over. It's just the nature of human beings."

In her experience with the Jazz Bliss shows, Evans recalls a great number of people who, after a performance, would be surprised by the quality of the show.

"People always say they can't believe this is happening in Halifax," said Evans. She adds that Jazz Bliss is accessible to everybody and that it "bridges the gap between the general populace and the dance aficionados." Jazz Bliss is not a cerebral show; it's there for fun and for the general public to have a good time.

"We like to target it towards the general public — we already have our dedicated audience," she said. "If we can make this more accessible to people who have never been to something like this before,

then they may not go to the movie theatre on Saturday night."

The show is comparatively not that expensive for its quality — especially when you consider that the money is going towards a worthwhile cause.

"What we really want to do is pay for the show and raise some money for the scholarship," said Evans.

Jazz Bliss '96 is described as having a cabaret-retro mood to it.

"This year, the show will have a different feel," said Evans. "The diversity of the choreography, the sheer energy, and talents of the performers will draw the audience into the production."

Some of the dances will be of the fast-moving, show-stopping kind, while others will be very beautiful, lyrical-pieces. The dances borrow from the styles of other cultures using latin rhythms, and oriental and indian motions. Many of the pieces will have a good dose of humour in them as well. When asked to compare the dance numbers in the show to something on film, Evans cited some similarities to the musical *Hair* and the movie *Strictly Ballroom*.

In last year's Jazz Bliss, Evans was involved in the lion's share of the choreography for the show. This year, that continues, albeit with an increased level of collabo-



ration; there are ten other choreographers besides Evans.

"I love to collaborate with people," said Evans. "I like the process of collaboration. In many pieces, I collaborated with the dancers to come up with a lot of the creative things that happened."

Notable pieces with other cho-

reographers include Le Jazz Hot by Shawn Isenor with guest artist Chuck Gillis; Jay Wells — as Marilyn Munroe — in Diamonds; and, an improvisational work by Alexis Milligan, a member of the Young Company. Evans let

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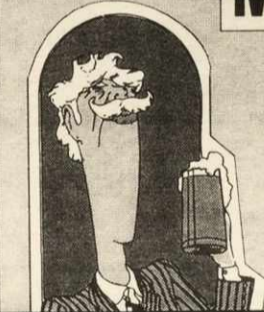
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