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Dance Allegro give their very best to an enthusiastic, sold out crowd

By PAULETTE PEIROL

By all indications, Dance Allegro is the most promising independent group to emerge from York's dance department in years. This verdict seemed to be shared not only by the company's colleagues, but also by the sold out crowds at Dance Allegro's premiere performances last week.

"We were thrilled at the audience's response," said an elated Lisa Hopkins, one of three co-founders of the company. "Even fellow students not involved in the show supported us to the fullest."

Indeed, it is hard not to support such a driven, yet refreshingly unpretentious group of modern dancers. The company's show at Winchester Street Theatre last Friday and Saturday was short, light, and lively, a palpable format well-suited to maximizing the strengths and masking the limitations of such a new troupe.

Yet Dance Allegro still has an arduous climb ahead if it wishes to establish itself as a truly innovative company. While all seven of the program's pieces were original works (choreographed by co-founders Hopkins, Kerri Weir, and Yvonne Ng), what they boasted in pizzazz, they often lacked in substance.

Weir's *What It Is*, for example, was shallow and repetitive, containing little more depth than an average high school aerobics routine. While the piece did feature some intriguing movements, such as Kathleen Dube's running/kneeling sequence, these were not enough to sustain the audience's interest.

Because many of the dancers chosen for the show (with the notable exceptions of Ng, Dube, Michelle Farwell, Gary Tai, and Rose Williams) have limited technical finesse, the choreography in some pieces was beyond the capabilities of its dancers.

(It must be noted that while the dance department does not lack talent, it does lack the rigorous technique training required by all aspiring dancers. By nature, university dance programs cover such a wide spectrum of dance-related studies that they cannot be devoted solely to the performance aspects of the art).

The limitations of the group's dancers were especially apparent in synchronized segments of works containing four or more dancers. In *Grasping Force* in particular, the ensemble often fell out of sync. Pieces in which dancers were given iso-

lated movements, such as *And We All Fall Down* and *What It Is* were consequently more effective in this respect, as performers seemed to feel more comfortable with their individualized movements and the audience was distracted from any one dancer.

The same principle applies to the stage and lighting design. The bare stage did little to complement the various moods of the pieces, and exposed any technical slip-ups even more. Inexpensive props could be effectively implemented for future shows. In *No Fear, No Hate* for example, a simple prop could serve as the much needed symbolic object of the character's emotions.

The lighting, by graduating theatre student Grant Smith, was very effective in *And We All Fall Down*, with Farwell in a haunting half-flight during her solo; in *Images in Passing*, with altering spotlights on Ng and Weir's opening "images"; and in *Skid*, where coloured lights are used to reflect mood and energy. More of these lighting techniques will go a long way toward making subsequent performances more theatrical.

The most vibrant pieces of the program were *Images in Passing*, an introspective duet choreographed and danced by Weir and Ng, and *Skid*, a jazzy work by Hopkins. *Images in Passing* featured a sharp introductory sequence with a touch of the exotic, and continued with some beautiful and unique partnering between Weir and Ng. *Skid* showcased Hopkins' flair for ensemble choreography, and was an appropriate closing number for such an energetic troupe.

While not the most critically successful piece, Hopkins' *And We All Fall Down* is perhaps the most complex and worthy of further development. A playful musical box piece on the surface, *And We All Fall Down* grips the audience with its melodic undertones. The work clearly has the potential of becoming an intense, dynamic drama, and its original musical score by Royal Conservatory student Philip Stern already supports this theme.

The remaining pieces fell into two categories: those needing further contextual development (*Afertonos* and *No Fear, No Hate*); and those needing much more rehearsal (*Grasping Force* and *What It Is*).

Fortunately, "The Company" is not a frozen entity, and founding members have concurred that they



would like to work with a smaller group for future performances. This will help Dance Allegro focus its artistic energies on the choreographic talents it already harbours.

"I've seen a growth in the commitment to choreography here," artistic advisor Juan Antonio said of the company before their show. Based on last weekend's premiere performance, Antonio's conviction has been proven true.

For those who missed Dance Allegro's debut, the company can be seen in upcoming performances at the Markham Theatre tonight (March 26), and at Burton Auditorium next Thursday, April 2.

Ontario Arts Council officer gives helpful hints on how to . . .

Get great grants from the gov

By BRIAN POSER

Big bucks for the big time. If you're a visual arts student and plan to graduate this May, or if you're simply an artist who has what it takes to work in the professional art world, then you ought to look into the Ontario Arts Council's (OAC) public funding of artists.

Nancy Hushion, Visual Arts Officer at OAC, visited York last week to discuss the various grants available through her office. "The OAC supports the whole spectrum of the visual arts," Hushion said. "The grants are available to help the professional working artist."

Because some students are supported by funding obtained through OSAP and other bursaries, "(they) are simply not eligible for OAC grants," explained Hushion. She added that "the rules all become a little muddled when we discuss the MFA applications." The OAC jury will judge any artist's work as long as the work is completed separate from

post-secondary class assignments.

"Student work is not acceptable," Hushion said. "The jury doesn't want to see selections from within the parameters of assignments. Ideally we'd like to see the stuff that comes out when all the influences of your teachers have subsided and gone away into the back of your head."

The OAC does not offer travel grants for artists to work abroad. It does, however, offer two separate grants: The Material Assistance Grant and The Project Grant. Either grant can be used in whatever manner deemed appropriate by the recipient.

The Material Assistance Grant is sometimes used help to cover incidental costs such as framing or the transport of works prior to an exhibition. The recipient is sponsored by a specific gallery and may be awarded a grant of up to \$1,000.

Project Grants are given to artists to aid them in producing the works necessary for a specific exhibition. The grants range from four to

eight thousand dollars and partially cover the costs of materials and living expenses so that the artist is allowed time to paint, sculpt or film full-time.

"The grants are not allocated with any regard to regional or gender distribution and all awards are given irrespective of the medium through which the artist works," Hushion said.

Grants are awarded by the OAC solely on the basis of excellence. Hushion told the students that the jury looks at 11 to 18 colour slides of an artist's work. "We are looking for a structure to the work, consistent area of investigation on the part of the artist. While this unification would normally dictate a portfolio of work in one medium, a short, concisely written project description could bring together separate media and relieve such a necessity," Hushion explained.

Enquiries should be directed to Visual Arts Officer, Ontario Arts Council, 151 Bloor Street West, 961-1660.