

Professionals innovate with dance, poetry

By CORINNE ABATT

For two days, Saturday and Sunday, Sept. 15 and 16, West Bloomfield will replace New Haven as a tryout town.

That's when Harriet Berg, director of dance at the Jewish Community Center, will give performances of a special dance and multi-media event titled "Detroit is Coming Back, Are You?"

For a long time, the energetic, innovative Ms. Berg had been rolling the idea for this around in her mind. Finally when it began to jell, she invited professional performing artists for whom she has great respect to join her in this special salute to the city.

"This is my out-of-town tryout," said Ms. Berg. "And that's what we should do — have community centers all over the suburbs where people could try out their ideas before going on before the tough critics of the city."

The company, gathered just for this special event, will face Detroit's tough critics at Grand Circus Exchange Nov. 30 and Dec. 1 and 2.

SEVERAL YEARS BACK at the suggestion of Detroit writer Esther Broner, Ms. Berg began to keep a journal and it was from this that she drew the impressions and ideas which were put together for this multi-media event.

Detroit sculpture will form the backdrop when Evelyn Orbach recites the Walt Whitman poem, "I Sing the Body Electric." Dancers will provide the sculptures that move to the poetry which Ms. Berg said, "seems to be about dancers."

She said Ms. Orbach, a professional writer and television producer, agreed to read the Whitman work because "she wanted an opportunity to be in touch with live theater again. I love her and her voice is perfect."

Judd Sheldon, director of the dance department at Detroit Community Music School, is designing costumes and acting as artistic consultant. Other professionals who will be dancing are Jennifer Pethick-Noyes, Jean Raczowski, Sabrina Jordan, Hughther White, Doug Brown, Judie Connors and Ms. Sheldon.

Films from several off-stage performances by Ms. Berg's Festival dancers are woven into the script. These will include pieces done at the dedication of the Tony Smith sculpture at the Detroit Institute of Arts, on the Kern Block and during a war protest at the Detroit Public Library.

"ALL OF THESE pieces of my life in different places are being woven together — my interest in dance, my interest in poetry and my interest in film making," Ms. Berg said.

Particularly pleasing to Ms. Berg is the opportunity to work with area dancers and dance teachers who are moving out from traditional boundaries.

She commented on the way today's dance company members in the avant garde movement "work off each other's energies," and how their bodies work together "in a supportive way."

"I miss not being able to see these experimental companies," she said, talking about a recent trip which gave her an opportunity to see what was happening to dance in other metropolitan areas.

DETROIT DANCER Christopher Pleban will be in the Berg production via film. He's now principal dancer with the Jennifer Muller Company which Ms. Berg said "is the rage of Europe."

The Young Dancers of the Jewish Community Center will be in the finale of "Detroit is Coming Back, Are You?" They are Allyson Schwartz, Ann Sheehy, Patti Brukoff, Patty Reich and Karen Tenenbaum.

Dean Egnater is lighting designer and Ms. Berg said that in a production such as this "Lights become environmental, in fact, they are the set."

The Saturday, Sept. 15, performance will be at 8:30 p.m. and on Sunday, Sept. 16, it will be at 2:30 p.m. Both will be in the Aaron DeRoy studio theater at the Jewish Community Center, 6600 W. Maple, West Bloomfield.

General admission tickets are \$3, \$2.50 for members.



Dancers Jennifer Pethick-Noyes, Jean Raczowski and Harriet Berg pose as dancers in a fog.

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