

Today's mailbag contains lots of questions

Story: CORINNE ABATT
Photos: DAVID FRANK

Peter Sparling's workshop in the Oakland University dance department this summer is one of many happy events in the department.

His classes, like those of Milton Meyers and Helen Earl previously, drew a large number of dancers. Department head Carol Halsted said that until recently dance was part of the physical education program. When the performing arts department was reactivated with L.J. Hetenyi as acting dean, many new options became available.

Now with dance a separate entity within the performing arts department, Ms. Halsted can let her mind run to an exciting future for the department. As more courses are added to the curriculum, a major in dance will be available. Course loads for this fall have been doubled and a new dance faculty member Susan Alter has been added.

Ms. Halsted will be giving a course in dance history this coming semester. "Can you imagine a course in dance history in the phys. ed. program?" she asked.



design

Gloria Cohen

She can even think about a dance company affiliated with the university as a goal for the future. And she can picture the time when she will audition dancers before they are accepted as majors in her department. "A dance program is known by its students," she said.

THE WORKSHOPS, conducted in the summer by outstanding dancers of the American stage, have always drawn well, with this summer no exception. Sparling, who combined the OU workshops with an appearance on the Meadow Brook Festival stage, said the opportunity to leave New York City during the summer is a welcome one for many professionals.

A former member of the Martha Graham Company and a teacher in that company's school, he has formed his own company, does choreography and

worked on the Graham segment of "Dance in America" recently on PBS television.

As he described the many different activities he is involved in relating to dance, he said, "It all narrows down to the concerns of performing and choreography."

In the long run

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He spoke of puppet dancers, those who simply come to work in a company and perform as they are told without trying to go beyond those confines. Sparling said that getting out of New York City for a time, granted it is the best place for a dancer like himself to be, gives him a taste of another world, and is stimulating for him as a creative person. Since he is a native of Michigan and received his first dance training at Interlochen, he feels particularly comfortable here.

THE PETER SPARLING Dance Company made its debut at "Matrix: Midland" earlier this summer.

"That was a real joy," he said. "We had 11 dancers and the results were so satisfying. It allowed me to create three new works in six months — a choreographer's dream."

Several of the students in Sparling's workshop have also been dancing this summer on the Meadow Brook Festival Saturday children's series and Ms. Halsted has done some of the choreography.

THE LAST ONE one of these, "Break a Leg," will be given Aug. 16.

"This is all the events that happen to dancers before a performance. The dialogue and repartee are quite humorous," said Ms. Halsted, "but the music is serious."

She auditioned and chose five local dancers who with the members of the Pastiche Wind Quintet make up the cast. Gary Mach, who writes the "Double Dip" Sunday TV show, wrote the script and Bob Sedlin did the music arrangements.

"It's a children's show, but it will give anybody who attends an insight to what can happen to dancers when they are warming up and getting ready for a production. And it gives the Pastiche a chance to do some acting," she added.

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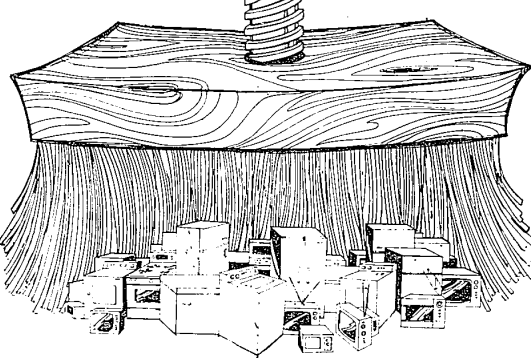
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