

ARTISTIC EXPRESSIONS



LINDA ANN CHOMIN

Musical mission: Christian college building program

When Kimberly Swan was appointed coordinator of the music department at William Tyndale College in August, she never dreamed the job would require 50 hours a week. But she's not complaining. Just the opposite. Her enthusiasm and excitement grows stronger every day.

"We're trying to re-establish the music department," said Swan, a Westland resident who grew up in Livonia. "Twenty years ago there was a strong department with two choirs and a community band. You have to work at it all the time. You have to go out and recruit students. I've been mailing out information, calling and going directly to Christian schools in the area to tell students about our music department."

Building a program

So far, 22 music majors have chosen the small Christian liberal arts college (formerly known as Detroit Bible College) in Farmington Hills because of its one-on-one attention to students. William Tyndale offers bachelor degrees in music, performance, church music, and music/youth studies. It also offers evening classes to accommodate working adult schedules.

"I know all of the music students by name," said Swan, who teaches voice at the college. "I get to talk to them about their goals, dreams, and sometimes their homes."

It's apparent that home and family are important to Swan, and William Tyndale College provides a little of each. Swan shares office space with her father, Jerry Smith, chairman of the music department. Her mother, Sharon Smith, was hired to teach piano last Christmas when the instructor accepted another job.

Program

On Saturday, March 31 Jerry, Sharon, Kimberly and her husband, Jeffrey, a tenor, will sing sacred music with the college's students and faculty at Grace Chapel in Farmington Hills. The program of classical, pop, jazz and traditional music will also feature the Tyndale College Choir, Tyndale Artists Ensemble, and the Praise and Worship Ensemble.

Paul Bechler leads the Tyndale College Choir, Smith the Tyndale Artists Ensemble which is composed of faculty, alumni and semi-professional choir members from area churches. The Praise and Worship Ensemble leads chapel services once a week at the college.

Swan is hoping to fill all 400 seats. The concert begins with "Anthem of Spring."

"It's musically difficult but musically satisfying," said Swan. "It's all about creation — how everything starts to wake up."

Sounds like an anthem for the music department if Kimberly and her dad have anything to say about it. Both believe the college's music department will become stronger with an increase in music student enrollment. To make the program more attractive, Swan wants to send the choir on a tour to Chicago or Indiana next year. She's already writing grants to get the endeavor and the group off the ground.

"It helps the choir grow if you have a tour," said Swan. "We have a long way to go but a lot of good things have already happened like being able to purchase a sound system you can travel with."

And spreading the word in song won't hurt either. In February, the college's choral groups joined students from Walled Lake High School and the Hartford Memorial Baptist Choir to present a concert in honor of Black History Month.

Please see EXPRESSIONS, C3



Roots: Ronald K. Brown's dance troupe Evidence uses a blend of African and modern dance to tell stories about the black experience.

PHOTOS BY ROSE EICHENBAUM

Inspirational Journey

Contemporary choreographer draws on history

BY LINDA ANN CHOMIN
STAFF WRITER
lchomin@ooh.homecomm.net



Working together: Ronald Brown (left) set his choreography for "High Life" and "Incidents" to music composed by Wunmi Olaiya.

Ronald K. Brown makes no apologies for the intensity of his work. Dances focusing on slavery, death, and the struggles of women of African descent, allow him to tell the stories of his people.

Using a blend of African and modern styles, the Brooklyn-born choreographer creates thought-provoking, high-energy pieces brought to life by his young dance troupe Evidence. Brown, who founded the New York-based dance company in 1986, is hardly an overnight sensation but his work is beginning to earn him a reputation as an up-and-coming choreographer.

Celebrity groups in the dance world think his work has something to say to any, too. In 1999, the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater commissioned him to create "Grace," a dance capturing all the fervor of a spiritual journey.

On Saturday, March 31, audiences in this area will have their first opportunity to see Ronald K. Brown/Evidence as part of the University Musical Society series in Ann Arbor. It promises to be a moving experience.

Food for thought

"I like going to theater to receive a gift that was on the filmmaker's or playwright's mind," said Brown. "Entertainment is nice but I live to receive a piece of the creator's imagination and heart. It feeds me to see what people are creating."

Observation and research are two essential ingredients in the Brown process of creating dance. Brown didn't begin choreographing "Incidents," one of three works on the program at the Power Center for the Performing Arts, until he read Linda Brent's story about the life of a slave girl.

He also does a lot of "looking at history" and listens to music. "Incidents" is set to traditional spirituals by the Staple Singers and a young Aretha Franklin, and contemporary music, including traditional Nigerian instrumentation, by Wunmi Olaiya.

"Technology is moving so fast," said Brown. "Sometimes it's all about what's new with little consideration of where we come from. Knowledge and power comes from history and legacy. Even though my work is contemporary, it's important to show what's come before."

"High Life" builds on images of the first section — "Bid Em In." The work likens the journey of ex-slaves from the rural South to the urban North with the exodus of young African people from villages to the cities. It is set to music by Nigerian

composer Fela Kuti and the King of Soul, James Brown.

Dignity and perseverance

"It's a piece about migration performed in an urban setting's voice," said Brown. "The dance calls to mind people on the slave block. What did people carry with them through the migration? A sense of self-determination, dignity and perseverance is what people were holding onto. It goes through different time periods and draws a parallel with the hybrid cultural development in West Africa in the 1970s when those countries got their liberation. It was a similar search for a better life. That's

where the term "High Life" comes from. The music comes out of Africa in the 1950s. You can hear the similarity in the music coming from Africa with the music James Brown was playing."

Inspiration

Although "High Life" received its premiere in July 2000 at the Jacob's Pillow Dance Festival in Massachusetts, the initial seed for the piece

Please see BROWN, C2

EXHIBIT

Artists take time to share their creativity with children

BY LINDA ANN CHOMIN
STAFF WRITER
lchomin@ooh.homecomm.net

Sherry Eid stands in front of "Dancing Wolf" talking about colored pencil and showing a photograph of the American Indian from which she created the work.

It's apparent by the looks on their faces that the drawing is not exactly what third-graders from Livonia's Cass Elementary were expecting to see during their tour of the exhibit. But that's part of the fun for Eid and three members of the Artifacts Art Club. Every year for the last eight, Eid and club members have led children on tours of their spring exhibit as a way of introducing them to original art.

Eid personally makes sure the children at Cass learn about drawing, painting and sculpture throughout the school year. Once a month she takes copies of art into the classroom as part of the Masterworks program in Livonia Public Schools.

"With Masterworks they only see the prints but this way they can meet the artist," said Eid. "It's a thrill. The kids



Art tour: Sherry Eid shares with third graders from Cass Elementary School the process she uses to create colored pencil drawings.

like and why."

Carrying tote boards, the classes of Helene Uhlmann and John Colby carefully look at each work while listening to the artists talk about the materials and process used in its creation. Afterward, students meander through the exhibit and cast votes for their favorites. A small group of girls begins to congregate before a grouping of works featuring cats. Some take the opportunity to sit on the floor and draw.

"It's a chance for students to look at different kinds of art," said Uhlmann. "The part we like is some of the artists are here to talk about their inspiration."

Another benefit is that many times children will come back with their parents and they look too. They don't always realize there is an art exhibit."

Uhlmann proudly displays her own exhibit of art works created by students before viewing the exhibit. In preparation for the tour, the third-graders created art based on titles of work in the Artifacts show. Kendall

Please see ARTISTS, C2