

Vermont Dance: Alive and Kicking!

by Janet Ressler

"One, two, three; leap, hold; keep it flowing, watch your arms!"

"Let's really see that extension, it's got to project all the way."

"Dance it, stop thinking so hard, play with the music."

In renovated town halls and opera houses from Hardwick to Londonderry, dancers in Vermont will be performing in spaces that have never held dance before. Support from the Vermont Council of the Arts and the Vermont Preservation Trust join two indigenous Vermont arts; dance, much of the work newly created, will be performed in some of our oldest, most beautiful, historic buildings. "Somehow, town halls have a different kind of space, they really have something to do with Vermont," enthuses Susan Sgorbati, president of the Vermont Dance Alliance.

For a long, March day in the teeth-chattering studio of Middlebury College, sixty dancers, choreographers, members of the Vermont Dance Alliance, interested students, and friends, swaddled in layers of sweaters and leg warmers, met to view and judge the work of twelve choreographers and companies auditioning for the proposed tour. Members of VCA scribbled evaluations, juggled pencil and papers, jumped and plied to stay warm and voted, selecting nine applicants. Sarah McMahon, a choreographer-member of Ketch Dance Company, called the auditions "an experiment in real participation, the dancers judging, producing and presenting themselves."

Opening May 26 in Hardwick, the Town Hall Tour will travel to Burlington City Hall, May 25, the Barre Opera House on June 2, Hyde Park Opera House on June 3, South Londonderry on June 9, and close at the Enosburg Opera House June 10. Companies and dancers include: The Jazz Company, Johnson Dance Group, and Ketch Dance Company, all listed in the VCA's Touring Artists' Register: Penny Campbell, Shelley Osher Ismail, Sue Lundy, Darienne Oaks, and Susan Sgorbati, past recipients of VCA Grants-in-Aid; and Karen Brandt, Sara Brutzman, and Meg Cottam. Every evening will be different, with three to five of the choreographers presenting work in a changing blend of programs.

Launching this independent, grass-roots project is the Vermont Dance Alliance, renamed and incorporated this year from the Vermont Choreographer's Workshop. The Workshop was formed after the first Vermont Dance Festival in 1982, at Burlington's Flynn Theatre for the Performing Arts. Dancers have met monthly since then, teaching each other in master classes, showing works-in-progress, and sharing their collective vision of an organized dance community in Vermont. *Vermont Life* recently responded to this renewed interest in dance and published a major article on Dance in Vermont, written by Sharry Underwood, a Burlington dancer-choreographer.

"This is a significant step for artists who have chosen to live in Vermont in the face of insurmountable professional odds," says Tony Micocci, originator of the Dance Festival. "The dancers have taken responsibility for their own artistic lives and the environment in which their art can best develop; in many ways this is a reaction to the Dance Festival and the need to control their own future."

The Vermont Dance Alliance presently lists more than thirty active members, and is planning a membership campaign. A newsletter will premiere in April/May. The Town Hall Tour is the Alliance's first project. Plans for a September annual meeting and a November conference are also underway. Serving on

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