

arts/entertainment

Ballet master directs dancers with concentration

By Penelope Smith

"He always runs over, no matter what it is," Ralph Batman, manager of the Pennsylvania Ballet Company said. These words, more of approval than of censure, were said of Benjamin Harkarvy, artistic director and sometimes ballet master of the Pennsylvania Ballet.

Harkarvy, director of the Pennsylvania since 1972, is an internationally recognized and respected dance coach, ballet master and choreographer. Before the curtain rises, before any note from the orchestra, Harkarvy has ensured the quality of the dancers' work.

Before the interview, Batman spoke of Harkarvy, who was handling the last rehearsal before Monday night's performance at the UNL Kimball Recital Hall. Harkarvy sat in a chair on stage, a picture of

total concentration as he called out commands to his dancers.

Fine tuner

"I love to watch his classes because he fine-tunes everything," Batman said. "He's very exacting and very precise in what he wants from a dancer but it's for the betterment of the dancer and the company. He's the leadership of the company and he's molded it into the versatile repertory company it is," Batman said.

After last-minute attention to the technique of his dancers, Harkarvy sat quietly smoking his cigarette and talking about dance and his work.

Like many people in the world of art, Harkarvy said he had a revelation as to where he belonged.

"I saw my first ballet performance when I was 12. It was instant, as if I recognized this was the most exciting and wonderful thing I'd ever seen," he said. "I went back the next night and the next night and the next night until I drove my parents crazy."

Silent expression

"I had the experience I think many young people have had. The experience of dancing is so overwhelming, it's like finding the other half of yourself," he said. "The world of feeling that is revealed to you in dancing can make you feel like you've found what is missing because it is a silent way of expressing yourself other than words."

Harkarvy has seen many dancers come and go. He talked of what a dancer needs, not just to succeed but to survive.

"To be a professional means you are taking on a career of extraordinary demands, both in time you devote to it, the sheer physical endurance demanded and then the need for emotional stability to sustain a career for a long time with its highs and lows," he said.

"The ego has to experience hard knocks. You want terribly to dance a certain role and no one else wants you to or not being cast for a part after you've worked so very hard for it. You must build up a professional attitude."

Versatility

Though he is a ballet master, Harkarvy recognizes the need for versatility.

"In addition to all of this, a contemporary dancer must feel at home in many different kinds of movement. It is not enough today to be a fine classical dancer—you must be able to move in all the various idioms contemporary choreographers use."

He said in the dance world, which demands such versatility, the American dancer has a better chance of surviving than his foreign counterparts because of the exciting American choreography.

As artistic director he also selects choreographers and is able to give many new choreographers free rein to experiment.

"It is my duty to aid the choreographer to find good music of a good designer if he wants a score rewritten," he said. "When the choreographer comes to rehearse the company or to create the dance, I am available for advice about such things or about the dancers, but I try to leave them very free."

Harkarvy said he has no obligation to put in the long hours he does rehearsing the company. He said he often sacrifices his own artistic time as a choreographer to be coach and teacher.

"I rehearse because I am a very gifted ballet master—this may not necessarily be so as an artistic director. I have a lot to give as a teacher and a coach and it satisfies something in me by giving my life a sense of direction—it keeps me alive," he said. "I do it to always be a part of the development of the company."

Band member says 'people like us,' but 'right at the moment it's survival'

By Patti Wieser

The Jack Greer Band sports a repertoire that extends from country to funk.

Vocalist and acoustic-guitarist Jack Greer describes the band as a variety rock 'n' roll band that plays country music.

"It's a bar band," he said.

Beth McBride, who also sings and plays acoustic guitar, said the band plays folk and some fast blues-rock too, adding that the band "really likes the funk... like Little Feat funk."

"Mostly what it is is having fun," Greer said. The band does a Greer composition, "Chance Again."

McBride and Greer said the band is versatile and often opens sets with solo feature spots.

The purpose of the band, Greer explained, is to feature vocals.

Other members of the five-month-old Omaha band are Jerry Steinke, lead guitar and slide; John Vergamini, keyboards; Neil Johnsen, guitar and vocals; and Buck Weyerman, percussion.

Greer, a native of South Carolina, has been playing professionally for about 10 years. Five years ago he moved to Omaha and started playing solos at the Steak and Ale restaurant. Later he formed a duo with Doug Fackler.

After going to Minneapolis and Atlanta, he returned to Omaha and joined the River City All Stars, which he stayed with for two years.

He then joined Danser, a band that eventually evolved into the Jack Greer Band.

Greer started playing drums when he was 12 and later took up the guitar.

He said he is influenced by James Taylor, Steve Stills, Lowell George and even Ray Charles for phrasing.

Greer said he finds it difficult to sing songs he doesn't like or do commercials, explaining, "I have to be able to believe it to sing real good."

McBride, who won the Last of the Singing Cowboys Contest at The 20's, sponsored by KQ98, said getting established and getting along with little money were problems in starting out as a band.

"It takes a lot of persistence... there are expenses," she said, adding that they don't have any money now for promotion.

Besides lack of money, getting six people with six different ideas to agree is sometimes hard, McBride said. But, she and Johnsen added, being in a band is a good way to make a living and do something they enjoy.

Greer said the band would like to travel but will have to wait.

"Right now we're still building this thing," he said.

He said he and Weyerman have been considering releasing a recording regionally so they can get air play for promotion.

However, Greer said, "Right at the moment, it's survival."

Johnsen said the response to the band has been good. "People like us," he said, "We are getting a steady following."

The band has played in the Omaha area and is scheduled to play April 29-May 4 at The 20's and May 6-11 at Shenanigans there.

Play extends effectiveness of strong 'foundation'

By Debra L. Miller

The production of *For Colored Girls Who Have Considered Suicide/when the rainbow is enuf*, which opened Friday night in the Gallery Theater of the Lincoln Community Playhouse, is a glowing example of a basic concept—when the foundation is strong enough, there are no limits to the possible height of the structure built upon it.

and momentum of the play as it changes from athletic exuberance to isolated despair.

Movement and dance are an integral element of the play, allowing the transitions in mood as well as theme. The variety and vitality of movement achieved by Davis and his cast is remarkable, especially in view of the extremely limited space in the Gallery Theater.

Members of the cast, identified in the

program as "lady in blue, lady in green, red, orange and purple," create warmly believable and sympathetic characterizations.

Beyond the immense truthfulness and believability of their portrayals, the cast generates an infectious enthusiasm and vitality that catches up the audience and never lets them down.

Cast members Donna Polk, Delores Oham, Martha Florence, Sherral Russell and Patricia West displayed a true and grat-

ifying understanding of ensemble playing, and the support and mutual esteem so evident on stage is soon reflected by the audience.

Although varying in training and experience, each actress achieved at least one memorable "moment." Outstanding performances by Martha Florence and Delores Oham were indicative of the overall high quality of this fine cast.

The enforced intimacy of the small Gallery Theater worked beautifully for this show, enhancing audience identification with the onstage action.

The set, by Tom Curtright, utilized a raised platform inclined in a gentle rake. Lights by Tim Jagielski, although too dark at times, greatly aided in heightening the dramatic effect.

Sound designer Marlin Petersen did a fine job of handling the well-chosen music which underscored and punctuated the production.

The only unfortunate aspect of this outstanding production was the brevity of its duration. *For Colored Girls...* ran for five performances this past weekend, which were marked by long waiting lists of people trying to get in, and cannot be extended due to conflicts with the next show opening at the Playhouse.

Only rarely does a play come along that reaches out so powerfully and meaningfully to involve an audience. As the characters reach out to the audience to relate their experiences and insights, the play reveals new facets of understanding even as it shows once again the universality of all human experience.

theater review

The "foundation," in this case, is the brilliant script by author Ntozake Shange, and the heights attained by the production based upon it are remarkable.

Shange's script is an outstanding example of the use of prose poetry as a dramatic form. In a short time, the play encompasses and explores an amazing breadth and depth of topics and emotions.

The language of the play is both poetic and expressive. It soars to exquisitely musical lyricism and then snaps back to the jazz rhythms of "street-talkin' jive" with pinpoint accuracy and truth.

It ranges from delightful and amusing light moments, as in a tale of a childhood adventure, to an excruciatingly real description of a horrifying incident, maintaining an admirable balance of optimism, pragmatism, poetry and pain.

Bill Davis' direction is sensitive to the demands of the script and to the needs of the audience. The pacing of the acting is superb throughout, controlling the flow

