

Tutus in transition

Ballet company combines modern dance techniques with classical music.

Dance

at the Lied Center for Performing Arts at 8 p.m. Sewell said the concert would push the envelopes of classical ballet and accent its range of possibilities.

By LIZA HOLTMEIER
Senior Reporter

No more identical ballerinas en pointe in "Swan Lake." The James Sewell Ballet would rather dance in straight jackets than romantic tutus.

"We want to shatter people's stereotypes," choreographer James Sewell said. "People think of tutus and pink and stuffy ladies in fur when they think of ballet ... but ballet is a progressive art form moving into the 20th century. People need to realize it's not just a piece of history."

Sewell is in Lincoln this week with his company, the James Sewell Ballet, to expose audiences to ballet's broader scope and magnitude.

Wednesday, he taught a master class at the Johnny Carson Theater that was indicative of his approach to dance. Sewell began the class like most ballet classes - with a plié combination to stretch and warm up the body.

But he didn't just offer the normal two demi pliés, a grande and a relevé ballet exercise; he coupled the steps with the modern dance techniques of fall and release.

Sewell will further showcase the marriage between classical ballet and modern dance with an eclectic concert

Learning to fly, HIGH!

According to the company's executive director, Gary Peterson, Sewell's own career serves as a model of ballet's breadth. Having studied under George Balanchine and danced with the Feld Ballets/NY, Sewell learned from some of the pioneers in 20th century ballet, Peterson said.

Sewell began his performance training at a children's theater in New York. Originally, he wanted to perform magic, but as Sewell took more movement-oriented classes, he decided to become a dancer.

From 1981 to 1982, Sewell studied under Balanchine, the co-founder of the New York City Ballet. Balanchine often is considered the father of American ballet and one of the most important choreographers of the 20th century.

Sewell said working under a modern icon like Balanchine affected his approach to the choreographic process.

"A lot of choreographers are depicted as being kind of crazy," Sewell said. "Balanchine was very much the opposite. He was calm and quiet. There could be chaos going around him, but all he would have to do was clap his hands. I found this was a much better way to operate."

In 1984, Sewell joined the Feld Ballets/NY. The company's founder,



SANDY SUMMERS/DN

JAMES SEWELL, choreographer for James Sewell Ballet, teaches a master dancing class Tuesday afternoon at Johnny Carson Theater. Sewell, with the five other dancers in his company, adds modern flair to the dance art form.

Eliot Feld, has been called the "bad boy of ballet" by the Washington Post, and his choreography is distinguished by its innovative movement stemming from a classical ballet foundation.

During this time, Sewell was exposed to more modern dance, and his experiences laid the foundation for his work with his own company.

Feeling it come together

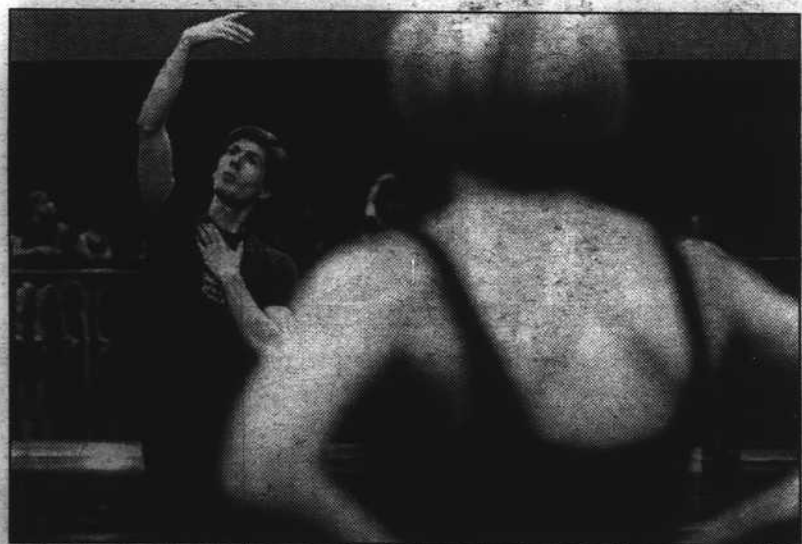
Sewell founded the James Sewell Ballet in 1990 because he wanted to devote himself to his choreography. As a full-time dancer with the Feld Ballet, Sewell lacked the time and energy for his own work, he said.

Sewell spent the next three years presenting concerts of his work with

dancers hired specifically for each one. In 1993, he decided to move the company to Minneapolis for a number of reasons.

"In New York City, there are over 400 dance companies," Sewell explained. "This limits fund-raising

Please see **SEWELL** on 14



SANDY SUMMERS/DN

SALLY ROUSSE and Jesse Hammel perform a scene from "Swan Lake" Wednesday morning for visiting elementary students. Rousse and Hammel are members of James Sewell Ballet, which will perform tonight at the Lied Center.

Magic mixes with moves

■ **George Balanchine** draws from background to bring performance to life.

By LIZA HOLTMEIER
Senior Reporter

The work of ballet icon George Balanchine will share the stage with magic tricks when the James Sewell Ballet performs tonight at 8 at the Lied Center for Performing Arts.

The incongruous program includes six pieces of contemporary ballet choreography performed to music ranging from rag-

Dance

time artist Scott Joplin to classical composer Johann Sebastian Bach.

Employing Chinese linking rings and drawing from Sewell's background as a magician, "Rings" will begin the program choreographed to music by Joplin.

Following "Rings" will be "Jacket," also choreographed by Sewell and set to music by Joplin. This classical male variation explores escaping from a straight jacket.

Next, the company will present a new work by Sewell, called "Good Mourning." Divided into

four sections, its theme is past and imminent lost. The first section, a duet danced to "As Time Goes By," features a woman remembering the loss of her husband after 25 years.

The second section features the same woman dancing to a choral prelude by Bach. The ballet's six dancers also will perform to Bach an adagio vigil dealing with more immediate loss. It shows them reminiscing at a funeral.

The last section features two couples dancing to "Agnusdei," from Samuel Barber's Adagio for Strings. It focuses on euthanasia and caring for a dying spouse.

Please see **BALLET** on 14