

Two-Ballet Town

Founder hopes new dance troupe revives cultural arts in Omaha

BY LIZA HOLTMEIER
Staff writer

Three months ago, the future of professional dance in Nebraska looked bleak.

But now, Nebraska has two potential professional companies preparing to present seasons next fall: the Central Dance Theater and the Omaha Theater Company.

The Central Dance Theater, the brainchild of dancer Brian Heinrich, will present its first public performances today and Sunday.

These performances come a week after the Omaha Theater Company announced its presentation of a professional dance season next year.

The Central Dance Theater hopes to fill the gap of professional dance left by the demise of Ballet Omaha.

Ballet Omaha, which disbanded its professional troupe at the end of its 1994-1995 season, officially dissolved Aug. 31. Its death left Nebraska without the presence of a professional dance company.

In response, the Omaha Theater Company and Heinrich started forming separate companies.

Both newly founded organizations plan to audition professional dancers next year. Both also plan to present a full season, each complete with a production of "The Nutcracker."

Despite their presence in the same market, Heinrich believes the two organizations can complement each other.

The dancers from OTC can benefit from the chance to perform with the Central Dance Theater, he said, while Heinrich's company can benefit from the contact with local talent.

Robin Welch, the director of dance at OTC, said she felt both she and Heinrich would work their hardest to see their respective companies flourish.

"I'm sure that (Brian's) working really hard on it,

as I am and as anyone would," Welch said. "When you work this hard, you don't have time to focus on outside things. I'm just focusing on our company right now."

Heinrich hopes the Central Dance Theater will bring professional dance back to Nebraska.

"As far as ballet goes, there are some really valiant efforts made toward professional work in Nebraska," Heinrich said. "But, we've lost that professional feeling. We need something that puts Omaha on the map."

For Nebraska to gain recognition in the dance world, Heinrich said, a company must present dance in a more accessible form.

"Most Nebraskans have only been able to present it in a frou-frou way," he said. "To get past that, we need to let everyone enjoy the arts. They need to learn not only about the classical works but about the moments that they can get on the stage with us."

To accomplish this, the Central Dance Theater will have a diverse repertoire consisting of contemporary dance from companies such as the Joffrey Ballet, Hubbard Street Dance Chicago and the New York City Ballet.

The Central Dance Theater also intends to present unaltered versions of the Romantic classics like "Giselle" and "Swan Lake."

"People like these ballets done full-length and in proper form," Heinrich said. "When they are done in other forms, they do not sell in Nebraska."

Heinrich hopes to begin educational endeavors as well. Plans include a ballet school providing training in a variety of dance and outreach programs with the Omaha and Lincoln school systems.

With such grand schemes in the making, some may question the organization's ability to accomplish the tasks.

Initial funding for Heinrich's organization will provide the biggest challenge, said Scott Jackman, the company's executive advisor. Because of Ballet Omaha's experience, he said, some people may be reluctant to invest in a new company.

"A lot of people expended a lot of resources for (Ballet Omaha), in terms of time and money. It's sort of like once burned, twice shy," Jackman said.

As a new company, the Central Dance Theater will have to work to prove its potential for longevity.

"People love to see a track record," Jackman said. "For United Arts Omaha, you cannot even apply for funds until you've been running for five years. Also, many people don't know (Brian) even though he is a native Nebraskan."

Heinrich hopes this week's performances will increase the

company's recognition in Nebraska.

Today's performance is part of a special reception held by Nebraska's first lady Diane Nelson. Dancers Scott Duquette and Rebecca Shirley will present a piece choreographed by Heinrich during the reception, which lasts from 5 to 6:30 p.m. at the Governor's Mansion, 1425 H St.

The Central Dance Theater will have another performance Sunday from 1:30 to 3 p.m. at the Destiny Café, 1217 Howard St. in Omaha.

Heinrich said these performances will provide audiences with a taste of what the Central Dance Theater has to offer: Dance an audience

can relate to and understand.

"Dance is something that everybody wants to do, and if presented that way it can have an incredible audience," Heinrich said.

MATT HANEY/DN

New Releases



Jewel
"Spirit"
Atlantic
Grade: C

Jewel's dedication of her new album, "Spirit," couldn't be more appropriate, considering some of the songs are ones that only a mother could love.

"Spirit," Jewel's follow-up album to her 1995 multi-platinum "Pieces of You," is dedicated to her mother, Nedra Carroll, and has been touted as showing a deeper side of the artist's personality.

Jewel herself referred to it as "an anecdote towards all the worrisome things in the world."

Since the lyrics on the album are about as deep as Jewel's recently published poetry, it doesn't necessarily fulfill this prophecy, but there are some noticeable changes in her sophomore effort.

This time around, Jewel has surrounded herself by a core group of musicians and guest artists with well-known names, Red Hot Chili Peppers bassist Flea among them.

The album is more of the same that has come to be expected from Jewel - folksy, earthy tunes matched with the unmistakably airy, yodel-like voice, many of which begin to sound the same about halfway through the album.

There are, however, slight variations between the 13 tracks. On "Down So Long," Jewel's voice takes on less of the high warble and swings down into the deeper, fuller range that is a lot more listener-friendly. Paired with the bluesier instrumentals, it's easily the best track on the album.

Following is "Do You," which sounds a little bit like Sheryl Crow and a lot like Joan Osborne, and while not necessarily great, is definitely a turn for the better with its rhythmic keyboard and chant like lyrics. The album begins to descend into poppy repetitive folk after these two songs, and when Jewel sings with a backup of only her acoustic guitar, such as in the lamenting "Fat Boy," she ends up being more ear-piercingly screechy than touching.

The album doesn't have a standout top-40 radio hit like "You Were Meant For Me" or "Foolish Games," and instead consists of soft ballads without many noticeable differences.

Unfortunately, what ends up standing out more than anything else are the Matthew Rolston photographs both on the album cover and inside the liner notes.

The pictures include interesting closeups of Jewel's hands and feet and definitely deserve a second look, even if the album doesn't deserve a second listen.

- Sarah Baker

Christmas is time of good cheer, bad presents



Steve Jabby

To many people, Christmas is a time to give thanks, visit with loved ones and get a lot of presents.

To me, Christmas is a time of sharing. Oh, and eating lots of food, and sometimes drinking ... heavily. Ultimately though, it's about sharing, so allow me to share with you a Jabby Christmas experience.

I've always loved Christmas. I love everything about it - the Christmas dinner, decorating the tree, opening presents and watching my little brother Jeff Jabby try to pretend he's surprised while my brother Jared Jabby tries to hide his excitement and still look "cool."

I feel warm just thinking about watching my sisters frantically open yet another Barbie or some gaudy play jewelry that, to them, just looks fabulous. It's great visiting with the family and talking to my great-grandma, even though she always calls me Ricky. I even enjoy conversing with cousin Crystal and her new (and often inebriated) hubby Dale. (They're not Jabbys.)

However, despite all the holiday cheer, one little thing always bothered me - crappy presents.

I don't mean to sound like an ingrate, but it just seems that every year,

despite valiant attempts on the part of my parents, I get a bunch of things I don't want. I'm sure this has happened to a lot of people. In recent years gifts don't really matter as much to me, but, man, when I was a kid I sure got worked up.

I remember dreaming of Constructicon Transformer figures for weeks and weeks, only to get the lousy Go-Bot equivalent on Christmas morn.

"Awesome," I winced, trying not to let on how crushed I was. "I can't wait to play with these ... these Go-Bots."

Then there was the time when I received pajamas. Now I wanted pajamas, mind you, but they were supposed to be "Dukes of Hazzard" pj's, not the "Care Bears." I mean what does stupid Happy Bear have on the freakin' Duke boys?

While the list of unwanted gifts is long, there is one memory that really stands out. It's a sad story of a boy and his dream gift: a Casio keyboard.

It goes a little something like this: I was a ratty little Jabby in third grade. I had square brown glasses, a shaved head (except for my bitchin' rat tail), and I fancied slip-on shoes quite a bit.

With Christmas approaching, I began to think of my future career as a rock star and the tools I'd need to get the job. Obviously, to be the next Huey Lewis, I'd need a Casio Keyboard, complete with sound effects, various beats and lots of neon colors.

I was a pretty reserved kid, and I didn't want to blatantly tell my parents I wanted a keyboard, so I tried to just drop hints. I'd watch the "Chipmunks" cartoons and comment to my mom how

cool I'd look with one of those keyboards you wear like a guitar. Then I'd go around singing the "Kids Incorporated" theme song and pretend I was playing in the band. I was sure she'd pick up on it, and so far my rock 'n' roll future was right on schedule.

Every night I'd go to bed imagining myself with that keyboard slung across my shoulder, rockin' out with my parachute pants and Vision high tops, singing love songs with Martika (who later went on without me and recorded the short-lived pop tune "Toy Soldiers"). In my dreams, I was the dude surrounded by girls with leather hot pants as all the jocko chumps stared in amazement at my keyboard-playing ability. It was beautiful - and all I needed was my Casio.

The night before Christmas I couldn't sleep a wink, and my fantasy was going on for so long that I had already made and squandered millions, saw my career go down the tubes and was in the middle of a custody battle over my son, a 9-year-old drug-addicted child actor.

Eventually the moment arrived, and I was down the stairs and in the living room within nanoseconds. I labored through opening a small assortment of gifts, many of which were nice, but not keyboards, and slyly scanned the room for a keyboard-shaped item.

Then as I crawled around behind the tree, there it was - an elongated package that even smelled of rock 'n' roll. My eyes lit up, and I started to squeak in weird tones I didn't think even my new keyboard could make.

I grabbed it up and jumped out from behind the tree like a ninja with a new sword. I looked to my proud parents and

my eyes welled up with tears. I couldn't believe it, my dreams were coming true right before my eyes. I looked to my brother Jeff Jabby, and between the sobs of joy, I said, "Look, Jeff, I finally got a Casio! We finally made it, dude!"

Jeff didn't care, but I went on like I was accepting an Oscar, thanking all the little people who stood by me for so long.

Then my dad said, "Wait buddy, you better open it first." So I ripped into it, and between the tears my blurred vision made out a ... BB gun.

It was hard to keep those tears of joy from turning into tears of sadness, but somehow I did it.

Needless to say, that morning was followed by about two weeks of phony smiles, half-hearted hunting excursions and no music or chicks.

It was tough to pretend I was excited when all my dreams of fortune and fame just went up in smoke, but I got through it. I toyed with the notion of being a famous hunter, but then I realized there were no famous hunters, especially ones who were allowed to shoot only sparrows.

Oh well, by the time my birthday came that May I must have dropped enough hints, because I was the proud recipient of a belated Casio Keyboard, and everything was great.

Of course, the rock star thing is a little sketchy still, but maybe this Christmas I'll get the parachute pants and pull it all together.

Merry Christmas, everyone.
Steve Jabby is the alter ego of Jason Hardy, a senior staff writer at the Daily Nebraskan. This stuff really did happen, though.