

BACK BENDING

STORY BY JASON HARDY ♦ PHOTO BY LANE HICKENBOTTOM

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KEVIN GIBBS
UNL senior



This summer, UNL dancers Kevin Gibbs and Megan Dant attended the American Dance Festival, a six-week session of intense dance classes and cutting-edge performances.

UNL students experience the joys and pains of dance

For most students, summer classes are a real headache

For four University of Nebraska-Lincoln dance students, this summer's classes were headaches, back aches, knee aches, muscle aches and most of all, they were unforgettable.

This summer, junior Megan Dant and seniors Monya DeBoer, Corbin Popp and Kevin Gibbs attended the American Dance Festival.

From June 14 to July 23, they joined almost 350 students from all over the country in Durham, N.C., for this summer's festival.

The festival, in its 66th year, is a six-week intensive combination of dance classes and performances that takes place on Duke University's campus.

Students are offered college credit for attending the \$1,560 festival and given the opportunity to work with world-renowned choreographers and take classes from a variety of top-notch instructors.

It's the experience of a lifetime for prospective professional dancers, but it's not without its bumps and bruises.

Dant said it wasn't very long before she found out just how physically strenuous her next six weeks were going to be.

"I hadn't danced in a month, and immediately I was dancing like crazy, so I was exhausted," Dant said. "It was

kind of shocking at first. It was sort of like a reality check."

From the get-go, the students were shuffled through four preview classes a day to decide which classes they wanted to sign up for at the end of the first week. Once the classes started, it was sink or swim.

"The classes were huge, so if you stood in the back and didn't say anything, nobody would notice you," Dant said. "I realized pretty quick that I had to put myself out there if I wanted to get any feedback."

While Dant was going through a daily routine of four classes from 8 a.m. to 5:30 p.m., Gibbs was having his own experience.

Each summer, the festival invites several cutting-edge international choreographers to choreograph a piece featuring ADF students. Auditions are held at the beginning of the festival to determine who will make the cut, and rehearsals are held every day until the final performance.

Positions in the show are heavily desired, but, as with everything, there is a price.

"The auditions were insane. I mean, a good 300 people were auditioning, and when the choreographer is picking six dancers, it's pretty nerve-wracking," Gibbs said.

Gibbs was picked by Russian choreographer Tatiana Baganova for her piece titled "Crow." While the festival's classes range in various types of dance, Baganova's piece was a modern dance exploration of emotions surround-

ing Russian history and the use of dreams to escape the bleakness of certain events.

In other words, it was a physically grueling three-hour rehearsal five days a week.

"I thought my back was going to break, and I thought my knees were going to give out," Gibbs said. "She expected us to give everything, every time. It was always 110 percent."

While the physical demands of the festival were excruciating on a daily basis, the work paid off—in terms of technical betterment and self-confidence.

By getting a taste of what type of work is involved with professional dance companies, Dant said, it made her more focused on her goals.

"This is what I want to do with my life, and I wasn't quite so positive before this summer, so it really helped," she said.

For Gibbs, the experience gave him a better sense of his abilities, both physically and mentally.

"I think I've come to know that I can do more than I thought I could," Gibbs said. "I've come to realize more of my potential and what I need to work harder at."

Though the festival ended less than a month ago, both Gibbs and Dant said they're ready to get back into a steady dance schedule.

Of course, Gibbs wouldn't mind a few changes.

"I'm eager to get back into classes, although maybe not quite as intense this time."