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Central Dance Theater sets sights on expanding Nebraska's arts scene

BY LIZA HOLTMEIER
Senior editor

Bryon Heinrich wants to reverse the downward spiral of professional dance in Omaha.

With his new Central Dance Theater, he plans to reintroduce eastern Nebraskans to the high quality of dance they used to expect when Ballet Omaha was around.

Heinrich, the co-artistic director and founder of Central Dance Theater, believes the key to attaining his goal is working with eastern Nebraska's artistic organizations.

"Without collaborative opportunities, the arts in Nebraska will stay at the same level, and there is no chance at all of it rising," Heinrich said.

"With collaborations, the arts can really go places."

With collaborations, the arts can really go places.

BRYON HEINRICH
Central Dance Theater founder

The performance is a fund-raiser for the company's first season, and it will be held at Omaha's Joslyn Art Museum, 2200 Dodge St.

At the performance, the company plans to announce its 1999-2000 season, which will include three performances.

Although the dates have not been set, Heinrich wants the company to perform at Creighton University's Lied Center, the University of Nebraska-Lincoln's Howell Theatre and again at the Joslyn.

That's not all Heinrich has in mind.

He wants the company to collaborate with some of Omaha's cultural big-wigs, such as the Omaha Symphony and Opera Omaha.

Heinrich also hopes Central Dance Theater will

Dance The Facts



What: Central Dance Theater
Where: Joslyn Art Museum, 2220 Dodge St., Omaha
When: 8 p.m. Friday
Cost: \$5 for students, \$10 for adults
The Skinny: New dance company holds fund-raising gala.

have the chance to work with other eastern Nebraska dance organizations, such as the Lincoln Midwest Ballet Company and the Omaha Theater Company's dance program.

In addition to performing, Central Dance Theater will have a school to provide pre-professional dance training.

Susan Manchak, the company's other artistic director, said these initiatives are imperative to a professional dance company's success.

"Sometimes, people think ballet is an elite form," Manchak said. "To succeed, (a dance company) has to be integrated into the community."

The creation of the Central Dance Theater follows on the heels of Ballet Omaha's controversial demise. Ballet Omaha, Nebraska's former professional dance company, dissolved in August 1998 because of financial problems.

The company's death and the debt it left behind made local dance supporters wonder if a new dance company would be able to garner enough financial support to make a go. But Heinrich said investors are beginning to take notice.

"The environment is coming around tenfold simply because of the knowledge that we are extremely professional," Heinrich said. "That's what they want in Nebraska."

The Central Dance Theater began by slowly introducing audiences to its work through small, informal showings.

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SHAWN DRAPAL/DN

SHUFFLE ■ CONGA ■ ROUTINE ■ SHAKE

PERFORM ■ JIG ■ CHOREOGRAPHY ■ JUMP ■ SWAY

Botanica harvests dark, exotic music

BY JOSH NICHOLS
Staff writer

Concert Preview The Facts

Who: Botanica
Where: Sokol Hall, Omaha, 2234 S.13th St.
When: Doors open at 8 p.m. Sunday
The Skinny: Group plays "dark, brooding" music.

Sounds from around the world will come together Sunday night at Sokol Hall in Omaha.

Botanica, a group built around the music of widely traveled lead singer Paul Wallfisch, will perform the "dark, brooding music" from Botanica's new compact disc, "Malediction."

Wallfisch has traveled to more than 40 countries, performing in such places as Indonesia, Finland, China and Guinea, getting sounds from every place he stops.

The newly formed trio, Botanica, recently recorded these collective sounds on "Malediction."

Wallfisch is accompanied by Ivan Knight on drums and Abby Travis on bass guitar.

Travis is a new addition to the group, while Knight was the drummer in Wallfisch's former group, Paul Wallfisch & His Band.

Travis, who also sings backup

vocals in Botanica, played bass at Lollapalooza for Beck and Elastica.

She has also performed with the likes of Spinal Tap, the Meat Puppets and Michael Penn.

With the doors opening at 8 p.m. Sunday, Travis will kick off the evening with her solo act. She will perform music off her 1998 record, "The Abby Travis Foundation."

After her solo set, Travis will switch modes and join Botanica for its headline performance scheduled to begin at 11 p.m.

Those attending this performance can expect a sound that is moody, dark and exotic, said Carl Hanni, a publicist working on



COURTESY PHOTO

THE ECLECTIC BOTANICA plays exotic rock blending the influences of its three members, Ivan Knight, Paul Wallfisch and Abby Travis.

Botanica's record label.

"Botanica is a very accessible, logical progression of lots of different kinds of music," he said.

"Their sound is a natural progression of what each individual artist has done in his or her own music."

Scott Schaefer, promotions coordinator for Botanica, agreed that the music is a unique mixture of sounds with a dark undertone.

"Wallfisch's music is dark without being too melodramatic and artful without being too pretentious," he said.

Botanica's music is difficult to categorize but would fall under the category of rock with a slight alternative sound, Schaefer said.

The music on Botanica's record can best be described by the artist.

"Malediction's" lyrics are about what Wallfisch called "the big

struggles: religion, beauty, death, art and magic, the awareness of time ... If we realized how small and insignificant we are, we'd have more fun creating something that lasts. It would free us to create beautiful things."

Madelynn Amalfitan of LA Weekly said of Botanica's "Malediction": "Records this dark and wily just don't come along that often."