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Stephanie Booth, Katie Au and Cynthia Maria Anderson form a trio for Mark Haim's dance, *Ply*.

Dance and digital arts: A match made at Meany

Thursday, March 03, 2005

The Faculty Dance Concert, slated for tonight through Sunday in Meany Studio Theater, is designed as a showcase for choreography by Dance Program faculty. But this year's concert will also feature work by campus composer Richard Karpen, director of the Center for Digital Arts and Experimental Media (DXARTS). And both the center and the Dance Program hope the collaboration is a harbinger of things to come.



Bomi Lee, left and Betsy Cooper dance in another portion of Mark Haim's *Ply*.

In the concert, Karpen's music for "computer-realized sound" will be used to accompany a dance with the working title *Ply* that was choreographed by Artist in Residence Mark Haim. Composed of sounds such as choral singing, bird calls, bell tones and clock ticking, with many silences in between, Karpen's work isn't what most of us think of as music. But then, Haim's dance, which takes place on a rug, is a bit unconventional too. He says it began as visual images and wasn't choreographed to counts, so he immediately thought of using contemporary music to accompany it.

"A few weeks into rehearsal I called Richard and asked if he could recommend something," Haim

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recalled. "He told me he thought some of his own work might fit in."

Faculty Dance Concert

Karpen came to a rehearsal, and very soon Haim's dancers were moving to his

7:30 p.m. tonight, Friday and Saturday and 2 p.m. Sunday. For tickets call 206-543-4880.

Camera Cantorum

(originally written as meditations on Karpen's own music) and *Life Study #4*. He has been altering both pieces to better serve the dance.

The kind of work Haim and Karpen are doing together is fairly straightforward — much like the work that has been done in Dance 530/531, a graduate seminar that pairs student composers and choreographers each year and culminates in a concert. Many of those composers are Karpen's students. However, the Dance Program and DXARTS are now contemplating expanding this collaboration. In the fall, MFA students in dance will be brought together with doctoral students in DXARTS in order to facilitate the making of what could be startling new works of art.

The dancers in the MFA program are experienced performing artists who are making a transition to teaching and choreographing in a university setting; the DXARTS students work in a variety of areas, including digital video, digital media art, computer music and sound art, computer animation, and design computing. The hope is that once these artists meet each other, ideas will bounce back and forth, resulting in a joint concert in May of next year.

"This could go beyond composing music for the dances," Karpen said. "Our students know computer programming and electronics and wiring. They could, for example, build a system in which a dancer's movement is being sensed by a processor which affects something in another part of the dance."

Both units see the collaboration as filling a hole in their own programs. "A real gap for our students was in this area of dance and technology," said Betsy Cooper, associate professor of dance. "Richard's students will provide that."

And Karpen looks to the dancers to help his students learn about performance. "The knowledge of how to perform is something that we don't have integrally in our program," he said. "Our students don't have access to the performance venue and research that dance spends much of its time on."

What actually happens will, of course, be up to the students. "We'll probably begin with some sessions in which each of the students makes a presentation about his or her work," Haim said. "Then we might have them attend each other's classes. But we're not going to mandate collaboration."

So the concert that results won't necessarily be composed only of dances set to new music. One

or more of the dancers could choose to work with more traditional music. That's fine with Karpen, who says that contemporary music has tended to be "ghettoized."

"I want audiences to confront the works of the past and the present," he said. "I think if you don't participate in contemporary art, you don't really understand classical art because you can't understand it as having once been new. Similarly, I think if you don't really engage with the art of the past, you can't understand how we got here."

That variety is certainly seen in the upcoming concert, which includes — in addition to the Haim/Karpen piece — dances choreographed by Jennifer Salk, Jurg Koch, Peter Kyle and Rhonda Cinotto to music ranging from Duke Ellington to the Squirrel Nut Zippers. It will be presented at 7:30 p.m. tonight, Friday and Saturday and at 2 p.m. on Sunday. Tickets are available at the Arts Ticket Office, 206-543-4880.

As for the future, Dance and DXARTS hope the collaboration will open up a new world of possibilities for their students.

"What DXARTS embraces is the idea of always creating something new in art," Karpen said.

"We're doing what artists in the past did, which is to make something new. If we're doing exactly what they did we're not doing what they did. I'd say we have a bold agenda."

-NANCY WICK

UNIVERSITY WEEK