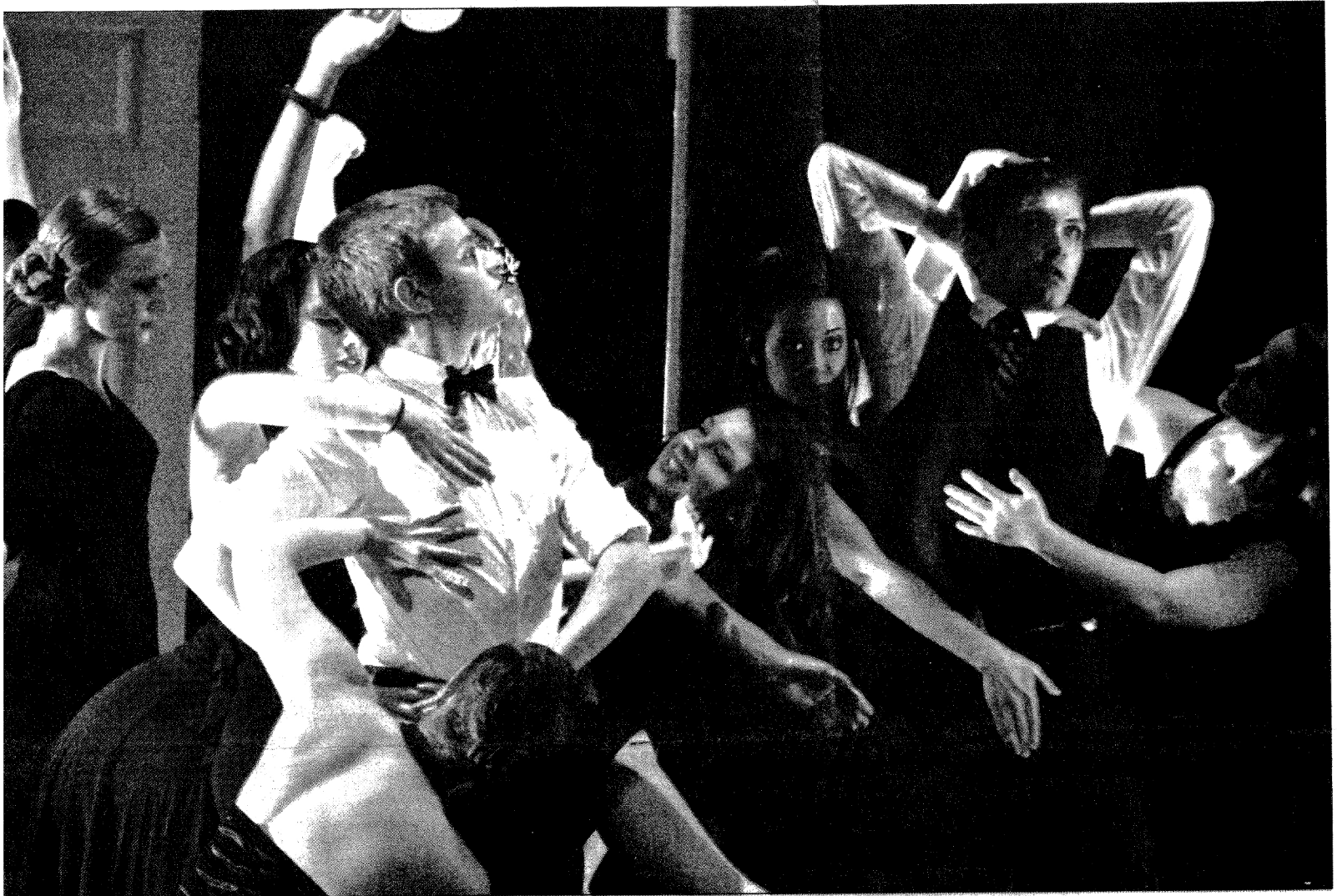


Not the same old dance



Photos by Elizabeth Biles

Wichita State hosted the annual Kansas Dance Festival on Friday and Saturday at Wilner Auditorium. WSU was joined by Friends University, University of Nebraska-Lincoln, Kansas State University and the University of Kansas.

Diversity of dances featured at Kansas Dance Festival

By MEGAN PAULY
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Wichita State dancers reenacted fate on stage Friday and Saturday night, as interpreted by choreographer Amy Baker Schwiethale.

Performer Josh Atkins auditioned and was selected to portray Schwiethale's husband in a modern, upbeat piece titled "Fate," set to U2's "With or Without You" at the Kansas Dance Festival.

"It's about (Amy's) life and her husband's life before they got married. I was

able to portray someone real, someone that I know," Atkins said. "Each girl represented a different path he could have chosen,

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To view a slideshow of photos from the Kansas Dance Festival, visit our YouTube channel at www.youtube.com/TheSunflowerNews



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and the ending phase is that they're married now. I think the style worked with everyone individually because everyone was able to dig into what Amy was feeling and how she wanted us to feel moved. It wasn't something awkward. It came naturally to all of us."

Schwiethale—along with faculty choreographers Denise Celestin, Sabrina Vasquez and Nick Johnson—joined forces with two guest artists, WSU alumnus Christopher Montiel and internationally acclaimed choreographer Janice Garrett, to showcase a diverse array of dances.

Three styles of dance—ballet, modern and jazz—were represented in distinctly different ways.

"People asked, 'Is there a common thread for the evening?' and I said no," said Johnson, director of dance. "It's an eclectic evening of dance."

The performances in Wilner Auditorium included dancers from WSU, the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, the University of Kansas, Friends University and Kansas State University.

An original contemporary ballet by Celestin, "In October," kicked off the

evening. The piece was set to live orchestral music.

"These orchestra students are referring to themselves as the KDF orchestra. That's a wonderful addition to the evening," Johnson said.

Like Schwiethale's piece, Montiel's "In a Manner of Speaking," also conveyed a deeper meaning.

"Everyone on stage portrayed a different part of language," said dancer Amy Pollard. "I was a victim of language, to show how what other people say can affect me. In the end, we say, 'Are you listening?' Are you listening to everything that's going on? Are you really taking it in, or are you just letting the words pass through your ears?"

Performers donned blue and white leotards to symbolize violence and innocence.

Pollard said she enjoyed working with Montiel, despite his lack of presence during rehearsals.

"He definitely knows what he wants, and he'll tell you what he wants. If it's not right, he'll correct it. He knows what everyone is doing offstage," Pollard said. "He actually set the piece, left and then came back during tech week, which was kind of

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AMY POLLARD, DANCER

challenging. We had to learn the piece a lot faster than the other pieces."

Not every piece stimulated the intuitive senses.

"The Rendez-Vous," co-choreographed by Johnson and Vasquez, opened the second half of the show.

In Johnson's words, the piece was about frolicking behind closed doors.

"Sometimes it's fun to play with a set with dance. I came up with an idea of free-standing doors," Johnson said.

Dancers clad in black and white formal attire tirelessly and dramatically entered and exited through a ring of eight freestanding doors encircling the stage.

"Everything they're doing was planned, which was crazy difficult to try to manage. Sabrina and I did it together, and we both laughed at the choices our students made. It really brought great life to it,"

Johnson said. "It's silly, it's fun, it's a light-hearted piece. There are a lot of acting moments in it as well."

While every moment on stage was strategically planned, room still existed for individual dancers to insert their personalities into the pieces.

"Something Sabrina Vasquez has always told us is that at some point, she lets go of her choreography, and it becomes the dancer's," said Liz Pomeroy. "We have to own it and make it ours. There's a point in which you have to own it, get past the steps, really perform and insert into the style the personality of yourself."

"The Rendez-Vous" was performed two years ago and happened to be senior Madelin Weisfeld's stage debut at WSU.

"It's fun to do things again because they get better," she said. "They get

richer and more sophisticated when you try it a second time, because you've seen it on stage before."

While Weisfeld did not perform in this year's "The Rendez-Vous," she enjoyed observing changes and improvements.

"Every performance is a chance to improve and grow as a person. You get to reinvent yourself each time with each piece and each performance," she said. "I just love that. Watching it and performing it are totally different."

The concluding piece, "Fast Brass," was as a personal highlight for Pomeroy, who will graduate in May. The upbeat piece was set to energetic Romanian music.

"The piece really pushed us to another level," Pomeroy said. "One of the nice things about our university is that everyone has such a distinct style,

and so we get a very well-rounded education. Something great Nick does is being able to bring in guest artists such as Janice Garrett who are really well known in the dance community. It really prepares us for after college, for the real world."

Pomeroy was not alone in her appreciation of Garrett, honored in 2004 as one of Dance Magazine's "25 to Watch."

"She is a goddess to us, we love her," Johnson said. "She is a friend but we also admire her work. We respect it. She is a fantastic choreographer."

Johnson changed the focus of modern dance at WSU to a broader degree in dance—incorporating an emphasis on numerous styles—when he became director to allow students to showcase a wider range of talents.

"Dance can be dramatic, it can be beautiful, it can be physically athletic, it can be comic—it can be all of those things at the same time. Every choreographer just goes off in a direction, and that's what is so great about the Kansas Dance Festival," Johnson said. "The thing people may not be aware of is that the same kids in our program are dancing all three styles really well."