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DTH/Faith Quintavelli

Barbara Bounds Milone with pupils
...despite heavy demands, she continues in her career.

Dance finds home in Chapel Hill

By TODD WELLS

Dance is a manual labor with no minimum wage, and local dancers who want to perform often find the toll financial as well as physical.

The story isn't new. A willingness to sacrifice is an integral part of a dancer's make-up, and a love for the art is the epoxy that holds a performing company together. The amateur and semi-professional dance troupes in Durham and Chapel Hill offer their members the opportunity to perform, if they pay the piper.

"Nobody associated with the company gets paid anything," said Pam Lester, a performer and board member of the Chapel Hill Ballet Company. "In fact, it ends up costing us."

But for Lester and others, the sacrifice is worth it. "I love to perform and I like the opportunity to choreograph," she said.

"Dancers tend to be workhorses," said Carol Richard, a UNC dance instructor.

But the explanation borders on understatement. It is common for a dancer to work full time, take as many as four dance classes a week, perhaps teach a class or two, and spend nights and weekends rehearsing a performance. Love or obsession are the only ready explanations for such dedication.

Jack Arnold calls his seven-year affair with dance "a love-hate relationship." Arnold toured professionally with the Atlanta Contemporary Dance Company before moving to Chapel Hill. As manager of A Southern Season, he works 45 hours a week and still manages to dance, taking classes and rehearsing with the Carolina Dancers.

"I tried to stop dancing once," he said, "but I couldn't do it." Now Arnold sees his effort to dance with the company as "worthwhile because of the dedication of the whole group."

But if such devotion leaves little time for anything else, it is the devotion of professionals and amateurs alike.

The Feld Ballet has come to Durham, and people only marginally interested in dance know that a virtuoso company is in their midst. The same people probably don't know that a company of locals will also perform this weekend, but to those interested in the development of dance locally, the Carolina Dancers' concert will offer an important glimpse of some of the community's best talent.

The Carolina Dancers is a company in transition, evolving from a training outlet for UNC's modern dance students to a co-operatively managed professional company. In terms of consistency and quality, the change is a step in the right direction, members said.

The company, begun in 1976 by Diane Eilber and Carol Richard of the UNC dance faculty, is carrying on the tradition of modern dance that blossomed in the 1920s and 30s out of tension between creativity and strict technique in classical dance. Some of their early performances were erratic as dancers of varying skill and talent tried to mesh in original performances.

But lacking support from UNC's physical education department and gaining more dancers of professional background, Eilber, Richard and the other members decided to go it alone. This will be their first concert without student dancers.

"We feel bad about not doing anything with the students," Richard said. "But with no money and no moral support from the department, it got to the point where enough was enough."

"No money" is a common complaint in the world of dance, and, for companies like the Carolina Dancers, money problems can be critical. The company's leap to professionalism has not lessened its financial burden.

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