

Dance concert gets audience out of chairs, flowing to the music

By Shay E. Slifko
STAFF WRITER

Differing from the traditional performance style, the UNC Asheville Dance Concert presented their performances in an open venue where the audience sought out rotating stages.

"Perspectives: Concert Dance in a Happening Format," set throughout the Justice Center, performed pieces outside and in the hallways. The dancers divided the audience into groups, touring them to each piece.

"The expectations are going well and it's a really fun collision and it is an experiment," said Kelly Davis, African dance instructor and choreographer. "It's been exciting because we knew this new style of performing and the venue wouldn't be perfect, but it's going better than we thought. We're all having a good time."

The African dance class kicked off the dance concert with "Celebration", a traditional West African piece. It was a lively piece to get the crowd excited according to concertgoer Katie Howell.

"The African piece is always one I look forward to in every concert. The colors, the live drums and the dancers are so powerful," Howell said.

"We B-Ballin," a break dancing piece, opened as one of two pieces beginning the concert.

The introduction of break dancing to the dance program and to the dance concert is exciting. The students have a great time with it and they all work hard to get the moves down, according to instructor Joe'se Adams.

"Break dancing is a lot of fun, and it was fun to perform and get everyone involved clapping and cheering each other on," Adams said.

Liz Passman, senior psychology student, said some groups missed her performance because a lot of the group leaders became confused, so only two out of five groups saw her performance which she said was kind of disappointing.

The diversity of pieces performed ranged from break dancing to ballet and from poetry to belly dancing. A group from Warren Wilson College brought Capoeira to the performance.

"The dance program is very ambitious," Howell said. "It's great to come out here and support the dancers every semester. It's something I look forward to."

About eight groups were led throughout the space, but some people said they were confused as to the momentum of the tour. According to Howell, all the performances she watched were well done, but there was a feeling of casualness that seemed to disconnect the audience from the

performer. However, Howell said, it's nice for dancers to be able to perform and then walk around with the audience and check out the other pieces.

"I like to see the expressions on everyone's faces as they're running around getting prepared for their own piece or to walk around and support the other performers," Davis said.

Dancers performed a modern piece, "Fishbowl," in the racquetball court while the audience watched from outside the illuminated stage.

"The fishbowl piece was interesting. I was thinking about all the fish my son has in his room, and it makes me feel bad now thinking about tapping on the bowl and keeping them locked away," said Laurie Whitaker, parent and concertgoer.

Students Raj Racine-Bowers and Regan Nellor choreographed and performed "Las Camas," a flirtatious jazz piece about love.

Howell said the piece was adorable, and the dancers were having a great time with it, which made her want to watch it more.

"Having started off with no expectations, it has reached beyond my expectations," said Chris Johansen, drum instructor who worked with Kelly Davis' African dance class for the past 18 consecutive semesters.

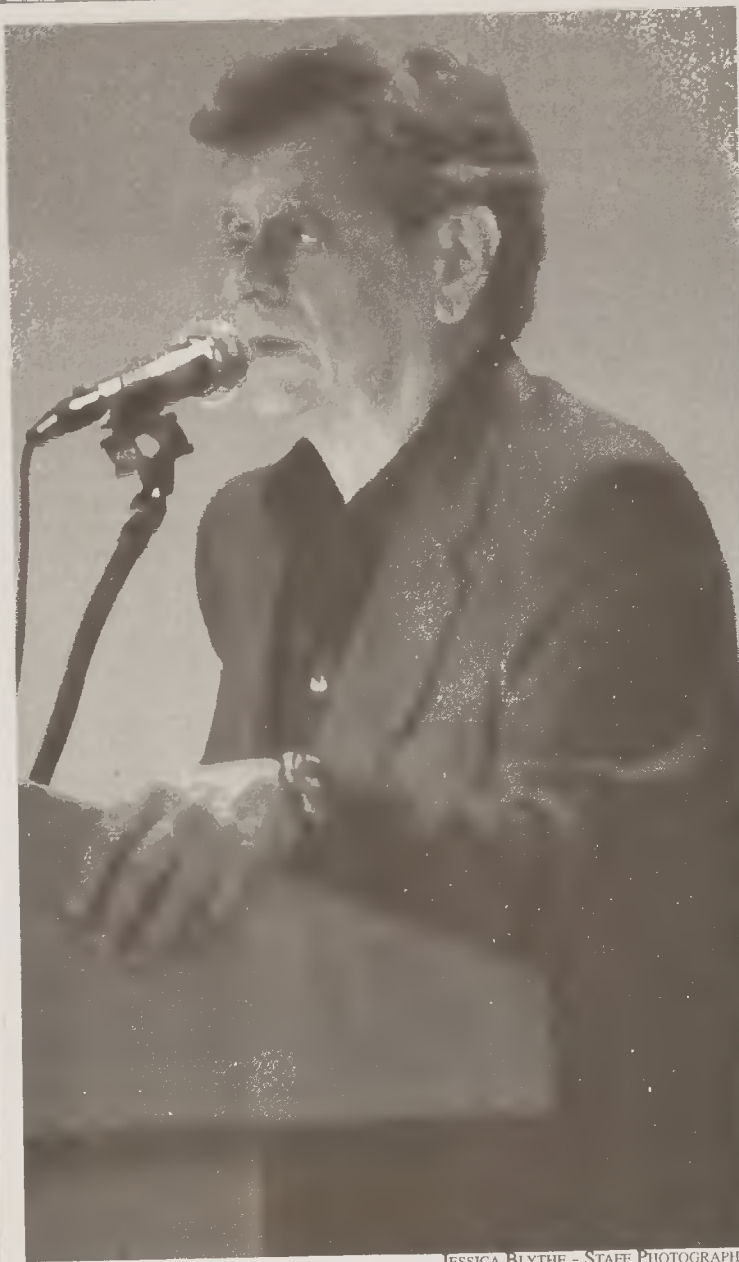
"This alternative performance gives me great ideas for a conceptual piece," Johansen said.

Shifting from the traditional single-stage venue to one where the audience moved about the space, navigating hallways, stairs and outside, there were some complications with staying on schedule, according to Kristen Masi, performer and senior environmental studies student.

"We were a few minutes late getting the group to one dance because the last one ran over, so we're working out the kinks, but everyone seems to be having fun," said Masi, also a group leader. "I don't pretend to know exactly what's going on, but people came to support all the performers and my job is to try to get them around so they can enjoy as many as possible."

Passman said the dance was different from what she expected. The dance was fun and interesting and she said she enjoyed coming out after her performance to see what was going on with the rest of the dancers.

"Throughout the semester, I have not had the chance to see all the other pieces because I'm not here every other day of the week," Davis said. "I love that we brought Warren Wilson in, and we brought Capoeira in and we have the break dancers here now. The dance program is more diverse than it has ever been."



JESSICA BLYTHE - STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Pablo Medina read several of his works of poems, prose and essays describing his quest for identity. His works incorporate descriptive imagery of Cuba, where Medina grew up. He is currently working on a fourth novel and collaborating with Garcia Lorca, Spanish poet and dramatist, to translate Lorca's "Poet in New York" to English.

Writer reads poems on Cuban, Spanish life

By Shay E. Slifko
STAFF WRITER

American writer Pablo Medina presents some of his works of poetry, prose and essays narrating his struggle with identity, rich in description taken from the memories of his native home.

"One of my major influences growing up was José Martí, the Cuban poet, of course, because he was from Cuba and because his work is amazing," said Medina, a Cuban native. "And being in this country I became exposed to a whole new range of poetry from Elizabeth Bishop to Garcia Lorca."

Medina was born in Havana, Cuba, where he lived the first 12 years of his life and moved with his family to New York City in 1960. Since then, he has lived and written in a number of U.S. cities.

"What I liked about this event is the difference in the crowd, because Pablo's work brought out people from the Spanish department, the literature department and many people from the community," said Rick Chess, creative writing professor.

Medina's latest collection of poetry, "Points of Balance/Puntos de Apoyo," and his most recent novel, "The Cigar Roller," a bilingual collection of poems, were published in 2006. He is currently at work on his fourth novel and is collaborating on a new English version of "Poet in New York," a collection of poetry by Spanish poet and dramatist Garcia Lorca.

"I love Lorca's work. I chose to translate Lorca, specifically, because he was there in Cuba and I knew much of his work. It's a very exciting project," Medina said.

Medina read poems in both English and Spanish, neither of which were translations of the same poem. According to the poet, he said he could translate the poems from Spanish to English but he would rather not because there are no honest translations. He would prefer to keep them the way they were written originally.

"His poem, 'The Love of Blondes,' brings a lot of memories back from Cuba. That

poem reminded me of the baseball games growing up," said John Tomé, who grew up in Cuba. "He writes beautifully both in Spanish and English. It is touching to read his poems or stories about my native home. I really love his work."

"The Cigar Roller" is a narrative of a man whose life is reduced to its most basic functions, according to Medina.

"It was a piece of work pretty different from what I've done in the past," Medina said.

According to Hilda Tomé, Pablo often writes about memories from Cuba and about what it was like being Cuban and coming to America as a young boy.

"I like his work because I am also from Santiago, the same town in his poem 'Big Babel,'" Tomé said.

According to Chess, because he provides a rich background and his work is great, Pablo is an ideal person to bring to campus.

"The book that I'm most familiar with is 'Floating Island' because I used it in two of my courses this semester, though the poems he read from 'Points of Balance,' the book that is in both Spanish and English, were breathtaking," Chess said.

Medina is the author of ten books of poetry and prose. He received a number of grants and awards, including those from the National Endowment for the Arts, the Lila Wallace/Reader's Digest Fund and the Rockefeller Foundation. Medina also serves on the faculty of Eugene Lang College, the New School for Liberal Arts in New York City, the Warren Wilson College Master of Fine Arts Program for Writers and the University of Nevada, Las Vegas, according to a biography handed out by Chess.

Medina's visit is made possible by an endowment established by the friends of P.B. Parris, a retired UNC Asheville creative writing professor and author of "Waltzing in the Attic."

"Pablo is a great writer and to have the opportunity to meet and listen to him is exceptional," Hilda Tomé said.

Creative writing seminar foreshadows future authors

By Tierney Oberhammer
STAFF WRITER

Students taking "LANG 497: Senior Seminar in Creative Writing" presented excerpts from their projects, which came in the form of poetry, short fiction, non-fiction and drama, according to Lori Horvitz, UNC Asheville professor of literature and language.

Standing up and performing in front of a room full of people really racks a person's nerves, according to Devin Walsh, editor-in-chief of Metabolism, who underwent the experience in November. "We knocked back whiskey before our senior reading," said Walsh, who read at last semester's senior readings.

"The caliber was outstanding. The quality of work was awful in the best way possible. Awful meaning full of awe," said Arielle Carlson, senior creative writing student.

Students concentrating on creative writing already made the decision to sacrifice any great wealth in their future, according to Walsh, senior creative writing student.

"You feel like you don't have the option to do anything else, though, because it would be unfulfilling," he said.

Learning the craft, getting feedback on one's writing and the community of writers available make majoring in creative writing worthwhile, according to Carlson.

"You can try to pursue it further in graduate school or you can do something else completely different," Walsh said.

A lot of students who graduate from UNC Asheville with a creative writing degree don't continue with it, according to Walsh.

"With a liberal arts degree, it doesn't matter so much what your major was, so long as you can prove that you've learned something and that you've gotten a broad education rather than a narrow one that you'd be stuck for the rest of your life," Walsh said.

An apparent growth occurred in the writers when compared to their writing as freshmen to their writing as seniors, according to Walsh, who has enrolled in several writing workshops.

"When we first start writing, we are drawn to the biggest and most dramatic actions: murder, suicide and sex. We haven't realized yet that there is more nuance and more drama in an emotional story that has a commonality to it that everyone can relate to," Walsh said.

More drama exists in a girl's relationship with her father than in huge, exciting happenings, according to Walsh.

"You can really tell from being in introductory workshops and then in senior workshops the massive amount of ground they have covered," Walsh said.

Senior John Stevens, who read on Sunday, said he thought the readings went well.

"There were fantastic introductions done by Jim Driggers, and Patrick Finn did two good ones. Gary Ettari introduced me, and it was great," Stevens said.

Students enrolled in the creative writing seminar each paired with one professor who acted as their advisor during the course of the semester, according to Horvitz.

These creative writing advisors introduced their advisees at the reading.

Literature and language professor J. Michael Gillum introduced Leigh Ann Hunnicutt and said her piece impressed and interested him.

Assistant professor Gary Ettari introduced Stevens, who read several of his poems.

"John has what every good poet needs: the ear of a musician," Ettari said.

Stevens pays attention to sound, rhythm and meter in his work. He listens to his work in the revision process and takes note of what he hears, according to Ettari.

Stevens also writes about topics we can relate to, according to Walsh.

"He gives (the poems) power," Walsh said.

Nyssa Johnson's work possesses a magical quality, according to Jim Driggers, lecturer of literature and language, who introduced

her. "Her writing is a lot like watercolor," he said.

Driggers compared the delicacy of Johnson's writing to the blending and fading of color in watercolor painting.

Literature and language professor Patrick Finn introduced senior Aaron Dicks, who writes about characters who hurt, love and dream, according to Finn.

"Aaron approaches his writing with hungry, religious humility," Finn said.

Kate Goodrich's poetry has been blowing Richard Chess away poem after poem, he said.

"I know for sure that Kate has begun to find her voice," Chess said.

Goodrich's poetry exhibits lyrical force, speed and insight, according to Chess.

Finn, who also advised Rachel Shrier, called her work biting and sweet.

"Rachel steers her character through a quiet chaos," he said.

Gregory Roberts-Gassler wrote a play during the senior seminar and two students acted out a scene during his reading.

Driggers said Roberts-Gassler's advisee, had ambition and excitement that was sometimes hard to keep up with.

This reading showcased the first section of creative writing students in their senior seminar this semester.

The second half of the student readings takes place on Sunday, 3 p.m. in the Laurel Forum at Karpen Hall. For more information, contact Lori Horvitz at 828-251-6590.

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