Lafayette Dancer Prepares For A Chance At Fame

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The haunting music is filled with crescendos and arpeggios and the dancer reacts to each change in the music with a series of precise robot-like leaps and body movements.

The dancer is Monique Achee, current Miss Dance of Louisiana, and the song is entitled “Five Days in Berlin.” Monique hopes the combination of her movements and the eerie music will be a winning one as she prepares to compete for the national Miss Dance title in Los Angeles on Aug. 2 and 3.

“This dance is a type of modern jazz dance,” said the 17-year-old dancer, who will celebrate her eighteenth birthday on the second day of the competition. “It is kind of weird and a little evil because of the different types of leaps and turns.”

Ten Years Of Study

Monique, the daughter of Alberta and Philip Achee of Lafayette, has been studying dance for 10 years.

“Monique begged us to let her take dancing,” Mrs. Achee smiled. “Her father didn’t think it was a good idea, but we let her do it. Now her daddy is so proud of her that he can sometimes be a real bore about her dancing.”

Monique has taken ballet, tap and jazz lessons as well as gymnastic instruc-

Monique leaps into the air during one of her many practice runs of her jazz dance that she will use as her individual dance segment during competition in Los Angeles. (Staff photos by P. C. Piazza)

tion. But she said “modern jazz is my style of dance.”

Whatever her style is, Monique has been a successful dancer.

As the winner of the Miss Dance of Louisiana title last October, she was awarded two dance scholarships - one to the Gus Giordano Jazz Center in Chicago and one to the Joffrey Ballet in New York.

If she wins the national competition, Monique will receive additional dance scholarships, dance supplies, trips and “more chances of becoming a professional dancer.”

Involved Process

However, the process of becoming a national dance champion is an involved one.

Monique and about 35 other dancers from around the country will compete for two days. On the first day, each contestant will learn a dance that they will perform together on the second day.

They will also be judged on their individual dances.

Monique was aided in the choreography of her dance by her dance teacher Carol Delarue, and Kim Comeaux and Susan Quinn.

“This dance is all Monique,” Mrs. Delarue said. “She moves and we simply tell her what looks good.”

In addition to the individual dance competition, there is leotard and evening gown judging.

On the second day, each contestant will be interviewed by a panel of judges and perform the group dance.

The judges allocate points to each contestant - 60 points for talent; 15 points each for the leotard competition and interview; and 10 points for the evening gown competition.

They then select 10 finalists from whom the winner is selected.

Daily Practice

Monique has been practicing for about five hours a day recently to prepare for the event.

Although some of the elements of the competition may seem to be similar to those of a beauty contest, Monique said a good appearance is important to professional dancers.

“This is not a beauty contest,” she said. “When you dance, people don’t look at your face but they do look at your body and the way it moves.”

Explaining that she is “excited and nervous” about competing nationally, Monique’s only real worry seems to be her weight. She wants to reduce five pounds from her 5-foot-4-inch frame.

A Back-Up Plan

Although Monique wants to be a professional dancer, eventually dancing in musicals and plays, she is a determined young woman who has a backup plan.

“Tt I don’t place in Los Angeles, I will come home, major in speech therapy at LSU,” she said. “If I make it in Los Angeles, I will continue with my dancing and go to school later. I know I will eventually go to college, but I don’t know the exact time.”

Deciding to devote all of her time to dancing was not an easy decision for Monique.

Before graduating from Acadiana High School in May, she was involved in many school activities including cheerleading, student government, yearbook and service organizations.

“It has been hard to concentrate on only one activity because for so long I was serious about all of my school activities,” she admits. “The only way I could keep my academics up was to keep myself very busy.”

Mrs. Delarue said being a professional dancer requires a strong-willed, sincere and ambitious person.

“Monique is an excellent dancer,” she said. “I think we have a winner.”