Moving South Concert Wednesday
Modern Dancers Are Making Their Move

Lynn Mills

With the presentation of a modern dance performance Wednesday at the Municipal Auditorium, Lafayette is moving up in the dance world. This advancement is made possible by the efforts of Moving South Dance, Inc., a group of local professionals who have gained experiences around the country and brought their talents back to the area to combine them on the Acadia stage.

While the company has been in existence over a year and a half, performing for area schools, festivals and special events, this effort represents their first major concert. Naturally, the presentation has required a significant amount of work for the five founding members of the company and their cohorts.

What initially got the production underway was a matching grant from the Louisiana Arts Council. This led to a membership drive this past fall, recruiting almost 100 individuals who pledged their support to the non-profit organization.

Money in hand, the company was able to actually plan and prepare for the concert. To begin with, they auditioned for additional dancers to perform with them in this concert.

Commissioned Works

Also, company members, who choreographed all other works, commissioned local musicians and artists to create works to complement their dancers.

What has resulted is a diverse program of nine numbers which should entertain dance fans and non-dance fans alike.

Highlight of the evening, according to company member Kathy Dusemski, will be the premiere of "On The Beach." This piece combines the choreographic efforts of Becky Valls, Ginny Whipp, and Kathy DeJenir Bark with an original music score by local composer Jerrit Burk and set designs by Lafayette artist Robert Dafford. In addition to the number, three other works will be shown for the first time in this show. These include "Vivaldi Variations," choreographed by Whipp, "HeliX" by Lorraine Leibert and Dusemski's "Atmospheres." Guest artist Kathy Leibert will perform a solo and a solo by Burk's creations, which was put on some years back at the University of Southwestern Louisiana, is also on the program.

Other performing dancers are Tom Boota, Trishna Cappa, Will Chapman, Becky LeBlanc, Julie Mitchell and Marlene Ziegler, who will join the company as an auxiliary member.

The remaining three pieces on the bill are part of the repertoire which Moving South developed since the dancers decided to form their own company. Because of new sets and choreographic innovations, the dances are somewhat different from their original form.

Moving South has a notable history prior to the inception of Wednesday's dance event. All of the founding members are graduates of USL in choreographic design who felt the area to pursue their field and further their educations in other cities.

Permanent Reunion

At about the same time, they all decided to come back to Acadiana and were brought together at a Summer Dance Reunion at their alma mater. Another dancer, in town for the event but with no plans to stay, suggested they make a permanent union.

This was followed by lots of organization, so the group could "figure out goals, real and ideal," Dusemski said.

They discussed the advantages of becoming a profit or non-profit making organization and decided on the latter because they thought funding would be easy.

Not long after their organizational meeting, Moving South made their first public appearance at the 81st Festival of Acadiaans in Girard Park. Here, they performed the three-part "Suite of Cajun Dance" which had been arranged by Valls when she was living in New York, where she received an award for the work.

During the next year, Moving South developed their organization (they're run by a board of directors) and made a number of local appearances in the meantime, the dancers pursued separate careers. Dusemski is a designer/dramaturg, Bark an instructor at USL, Valls and Whipp are new mothers and Leibert is helping a friend build a sailboat which they plan to take on the high seas.

Moving South dancers to receive a small stipend for the average of 14 hours a week they devote to rehearsals, in addition to organizational time.

Time To Tour

After some time off following the concert, the dancers plan to take their act on the road. They've got an engagement lined up with the Lake Charles Civic Ballet at the end of March and also hope to get into area schools.

"Our goal is to educate people in the finer arts," Dusemski explained. "We've been encouraged by the responses from people who appreciate our efforts and the way we culturally connect."

Because of the established repertory, it won't be difficult for them to perform on location, since extensive rehearsal time won't be necessary. In addition, the sets and props have been designed for easy mobility.

During their evolution, Dusemski noted that a shortage of time has been the only significant frustration. On the positive side, she cited that "We've been emotionally balanced, have developed more financial contacts and are always learning. Thanks to their learning and educating, Moving South is a step in the right direction for all of Acadiana."

Moving South's Evening of Dance begins at 8 p.m. Tickets for the performance are available at the Acadiaans Arts Council and Racoon Records.