

The Examiner

Young performers get big chance with Vision Series

By RACHEL HOWARD
Of the Examiner Staff

The dance is more serious than you might expect from high school choreographers, a kind of ballet-music video about a volatile love triangle. Intense material, but not yet as engrossing as it could be.

"I want you to do it again," shouts Deborah Slater, artistic director of Deborah Slater Dance Theater. "I'm going to yell at you the whole time and I'm going to yell at you about focus."

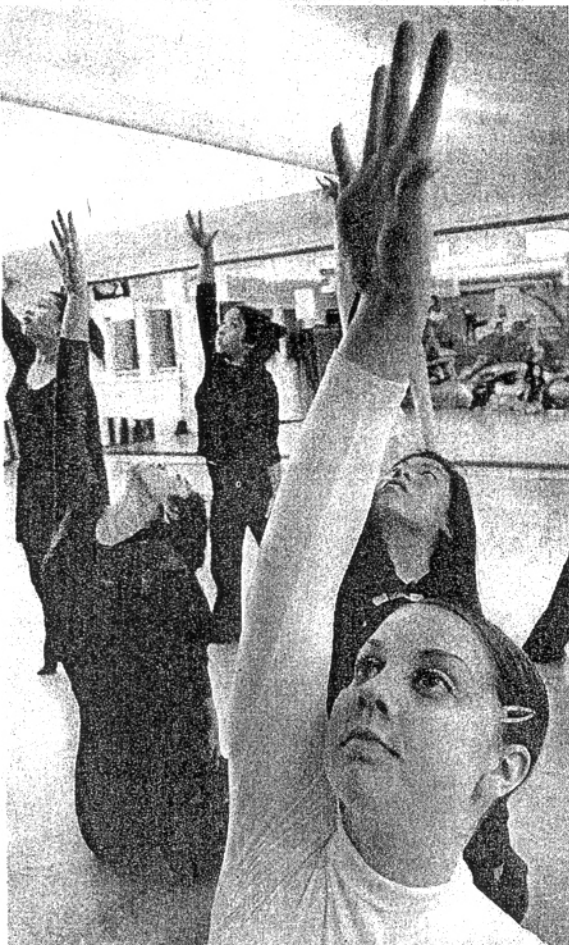
After the run-through come yet more refinements. "Beau touches our face so he directs the attention from between us to him," explains Tracy Lopez, a senior at San Francisco's George Washington High and one of three students who choreographed this four-minute work for 12 peers. "Then Yolanda and I look at each other for one last moment. Does that sound...?" She trails off, expectant.

"I like the idea of it," Slater says. "It's a question of making it come across. It's about making something move from your head out to the audience. That's the challenge."

"Yeah," Lopez says quietly, as though realizing something deep.

Throughout the city and the Bay Area, in 11 other local high schools, a similar after-school scene is playing out as part of the third annual Vision Series. Created and run almost single-handedly by choreographer Donnette Heath, the program teams novice high school dance-makers with professionals for two extensive critique sessions, and also provides emerging area companies a quick pre-performance consultation with local dance veterans. Most impressive is the final product: three respectably lit and costumed showcases, running this weekend and next, displaying the work of students and emerging pros in no less a venue than the Cowell Theater. Some of the more recognizable professional participants this year are Landini Dance Company, Megan Nicely, and Dana Lawton; Heath's company Dance Repertory/San Francisco also presents a work on each program.

"We can be so paranoid about showing our work, especially these kids," says Heath, who, despite receiving "very little funding," has managed to nearly double participation this year. "They're in a vulnerable state, and so are the young professional artists, who move to San Francisco, after all, because they want to become something big. This is about the performance opportunity, the



DAVE KENNEDY/Examiner

Caitlin Boehm, 17, dances during class at Washington School.

time on stage. The performers are going to walk away from this feeling validated, feeling positive."

The performers aren't the only ones to benefit.

"This is just fun for me," says Slater, who runs her company out of a studio/performance space at Army and Mission streets. "I really love to be able to talk to the kids about making work because it's something I'm passionate about. To be able to come and say 'Yeah, you can make a life out of this. Don't expect to get paid, but you can make a life of it.'"

"There's a lot of growth," says Nina Mayer, advanced dance teacher at George Washington High, a Vision participant since the program's inception. "It's important for the kids to get feedback from the outside. I've been watching it from the beginning and I need a set of fresh eyes to see things I didn't. Or even the

same things, and maybe they'll hear it from someone beside the teacher who's here every day."

The students' gratification, however, is more delayed. At the moment, they're still earning it, as Slater makes them perform the work facing the opposite wall, and then, in a breakthrough experiment, while faking laughter.

"I'm nervous, really nervous," Lopez says between run-throughs.

"It's getting there," Slater shouts. "This piece could be extremely dramatic if you guys just really practice holding on to that drama."

Vision Series 2001 presents three separate programs Friday and Saturday and Feb. 10 at 8 p.m. at Fort Mason's Cowell Theater. Tickets are \$15 general and \$10 for students; call (415) 441-3687.

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