

STEAMBOAT DANCE THEATER: "I LOVE IT WHEN THE LIGHTS COME ON"

Noel Hefty

Julie Filler

Robin Getter

PART I

by Stacy Sherr



Steamboat Pilot Photo

NOEL HEFTY

I began to dance when I was four years old. My first class was in Miami, Florida, and I took ballet. I loved it. When the rest of the little girls cried because the teacher was so strict, I didn't.

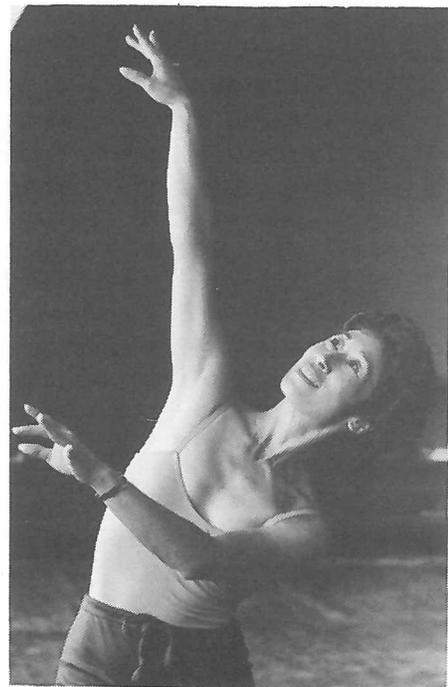
Then in second grade I moved to Steamboat and took classes from Karin Hanna. I went to class once a week, and the day I had dance was the best day of the week. I continued to take dance from Karin for as long as I could. Then after I graduated from eighth grade, I began to take classes from Polly Cogswell. She encouraged me to audition for the Steamboat Dance Concert. I only made it for her piece, but that year I got to experience what takes place, and all the hard work that is involved.

My second year in the concert was more serious. This made me think that dance was really what I wanted to do. That year I could feel the love and closeness in the Steamboat Dance Concert, which encouraged me to continue to dance.

I'm now a junior in high school; I am in *Three Wire Winter*. My story for this class is an article to explain how important the choreographers and directors in the Steamboat Dance Theatre are. Each of them explains her background and love for dance. My first interview was with Noel Hefty, who helped get Steamboat Dance Concert started. The second interview was Julie Filler. She has developed a strong ballet involvement with many locals of all ages. The last person I interviewed to close Part I was Robin Getter. She has studied African jazz, but she has created her own style and locals love it.

NOEL HEFTY

Noel started her story by giving me her background in dance. "I started dancing when I was four or five. I started with ballet and didn't like it. I wasn't very good at it. So I went to another dance studio in St. Louis called Riverton's Contemporary Dance. It was



Steamboat Pilot Photo

**KAY HENDERSON IS NOW HEAD OF
DANCE AT STEPHENS COLLEGE**

modern dance, but it didn't have any particular style or technique. It was just for kids. Dance was the one thing that I succeeded in, and I really loved it. I had a good time doing it, so I just kept at it. I stayed with that studio until I graduated from high school.

"Also, through my high school years, I got involved with another teacher who was trained in the Martha Graham technique, and I get very interested in that. I learned a lot from this woman, and I learned about choreography. My first summer after high school graduation, I went to New York and studied at the Martha Graham School of Contemporary Dance and then went on to the University of Wisconsin. There I learned a lot of different modern techniques, and I received my degree in dance education.

"I guess I have an addiction to dance because as I was growing up, it was the thing I did the best. I was very good in math, but not that good in English. I was terrible in foreign languages. Dance was my forte. I was never technically good enough to be a professional performer. One of the reasons I yell at my students to point their toes is that I always had a weak point. People used to always yell at me about pointing my toes. I don't want anyone to get away with sloppy feet.

"I had a lot of stage presence, and I thought my choreography had promise. As in anything, the more I studied about different techniques and styles and the more I saw, the more interested I became. I have always been associated with dance, and yet I also love training in dance, as I do in theatre."

I asked Noel how Community Dance Concert got started in Steamboat. "When I first moved to Steamboat in 1972, I didn't know anybody except my real estate agent. She introduced me to Kay Henderson. Kay is now the head of the dance department at Stephens College in Columbia, Missouri, and also head of the dance department at Perry/Mansfield. Kay introduced me to another lady named Pam Foster. Kay and Pam were Stephens graduates and had been friends before. They introduced me to Wendy Fisher and Debbie Wheaton.

"Wendy and Debbie were trained in ballet. Pam and Kay were trained in their form of modern dance that they had learned from Harriette Anne Gray, with whom I also studied later on. I was concentrating on the Martha Graham technique. We decided to put on a dance concert. There were seven of us who performed in the concert at the high school in 1973. We called ourselves the Northwest Dance Group. I think we sold maybe 100 to 150 tickets, and we were really excited about it.

"We did a very good job. There was a lot of variety because we were different types of choreographers.

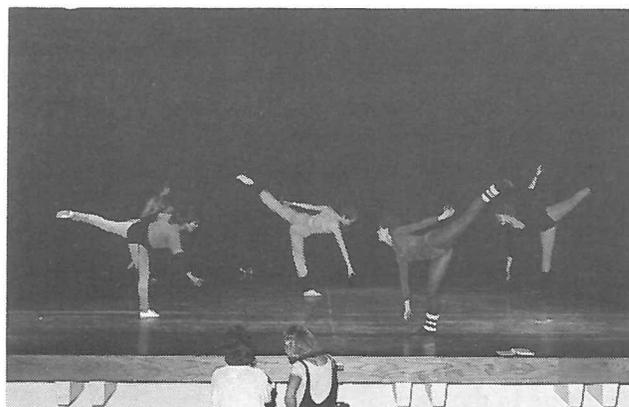
We had some nice pieces there, and it was a good show. We decided to keep it going. The next winter we started dance classes. Kay, Pam, and I were teaching to raise money for these concerts. Wendy hurt her knee skiing. Kay ended up teaching a semester at Stephens College. People kept coming and going, so we never got it together to put on another concert.

"In 1978 a local Steamboat woman wanted to put on a dance concert. She asked me to help direct it and use some of my choreography. Kay contributed a piece to the concert as did Debbie and Wendy. I think we did two nights at the Depot. It was very good dancing, a good concert, and we had a good audience response. That's how it all got started.

"In the early years, the difficulty I had was just the lack of choreographers to put on a full show. It was hard to get enough pieces together and there weren't as many dancers then as there are now. This was also before the Steamboat Repertory Theater, so we didn't have great lighting. There were people who knew lighting, but they didn't know dance lighting. They knew theater lighting, which was very simplistic lighting, nothing fancy. Another difficulty was that the Depot wasn't a good place to perform in.

"It wasn't until the Depot started selling out, and we were doing six nights of performances (two weekends in a row) that we moved to the high school; that was in 1980. Our first year at the high school we sold out both Friday and Saturday, so we decided to go to three nights. The Depot seats about 120; the high school seats 555. A quarter of the population of Steamboat would come to the concert in three nights at the high school.

"Another problem we had in our development was space. Steamboat Repertory Theater was in the Depot, so we were always competing for rehearsal space. We were all over the place, like upstairs in the Pine Grove. We rehearsed a lot on the cement floor at the college. We would take any empty room we could find and rehearse there. Rehearsal space was always a problem.





"SID LEWIS WAS ONE OF THE BEST MALE DANCERS WE HAVE HAD."

"There was an advantage to Steamboat Repertory being in existence, however. We were able to use their personnel for lighting design and technicians. That really spoiled me. So when Steamboat Repertory went under, I started hiring lighting technicians to come up and design the show, people who really knew how to light."

Noel discussed her shift from being a dancer to a director. "Directing is very exciting, and I love it. I love the studio time and working with dancers, cleaning up the pieces, and making the choreography smoother. However, it is very time-consuming. As far as producing and directing the show, just about every year I would say to all my friends, 'This is it, this is the last year, I'm never doing this again.' Of course, the show would happen, it would be good, and I would get all these wonderful strokes from the dancers and the people in the community. So I would end up doing it again."

"Sometimes directing is frustrating because choreographers don't like where their dances are placed in the program. That is always a hard part: putting the program together and giving it a good balance. Consideration had to be given to the type of dances (i.e., ballet, modern and tap) as well as to costume changes. That is why I made a limit on the number of dances a particular dancer could be in. It's too hard to put a program together so that dancers weren't in one piece right after another. If they were in more than four it was rough. Sid Lewis, for instance, was

one of the best male dancers we have had. One year it seemed like he was in every piece. I said, 'We can't do this.' It's too hard to put the program together when they are in that many pieces.

"I get as nervous as the dancers, if not more so. Not only am I working in the studio trying to clean up the dances, I'm making sure the program is right. I'm making sure the publicity gets out and that it's correct. All these things that are involved are very time-consuming and nerve-wracking. I worked on the Steamboat Dance Concert six months out of each year.

"The worst year I had was 1981, and I was performing that year. I wanted to give it one more shot, try one more time to be on stage. I was more nervous about dancing than directing. One thing that got me through that year was the production manager. The production manager is the person that sits in the crow's nest and calls the show. Our production manager was hospitalized after the first night. So I had to find someone else to call the show, and I picked Marsha Fitzpatrick, who was the executive director of the Arts Council.

"She was great, but she didn't know the cues. She hadn't gone through the rehearsals. So I would sit in the crow's nest and give her the cues. Then when it was my turn to dance I would run back and do my piece, and then go running back to the crow's nest and finish the show, and then go running back to take the final bow. That was real crazy.

"Through that show, I discovered that I was much better in the crow's nest than I was on the stage. That's why I stopped dancing. I get just as nervous producing a show as I do dancing. I have to worry about the house and getting people seated, making sure nobody comes into the house during a dance, that there is a 15-minute intermission, and getting everybody back. So I'm always working the whole time.

"We finally decided to hire an artistic consultant to come in because the responsibility of critiquing other dances had always fallen upon me, and that was difficult. I would be so close to the pieces, and I couldn't always see things. I needed someone from the outside to come in and say, 'Yes, this will work, no, that doesn't work, and here are some suggestions to change them.' When a transition doesn't work, I don't have time to think of a solution. The outside person can come up with one with the choreographer.

"That was a major positive change, I believe, for the company to get artistic consultants to come in. Last year, 1987, was my year to be an artistic consultant. It's very hard. It's really nerve-wracking because you only see the pieces twice. When I came back to

see the concert and saw these pieces again, I thought, 'Boy, I'm sorry I missed that. I should have changed one section of that piece because it was too long. I didn't notice that the first time I saw it, but it should have been cut.'

"I always threatened to give a choreography class in Steamboat. I should have done it. My feeling about choreography is that a piece is always too long. You should cut one-third to one-half out almost immediately, then trim it down even more. If you can't say it in five minutes, you can't say it in ten, but choreographers traditionally take too long to say what they have to say.

"In order to keep the audience's attention, keep it short and sweet. Short and sweet can be five minutes or it can be ten to fifteen minutes. As long as you are developing what you are saying, that's the important thing. All that time if you are just repeating and going over the same territories, then it needs to be cut."

I asked Noel if it was hard to get dancers in Steamboat to take dance seriously. "It really wasn't after the first concert I had done. I realized that I had to be very strong as a producer and come on very strong. I know I intimidated a lot of people because of that. It was very important to me that these women and girls who are going to get up there in front of their friends and family not make fools of themselves.

"If you are going to do something, then do it right or don't do it at all. I have always demanded a lot out of the dancers, and I demanded a lot of professionalism, much more than in other community dance groups. Once the dance concerts became so popular, everyone wanted to be involved in them. Then people did take dance seriously in the community. There was always a strong dance tradition in Steamboat because of Perry/Mansfield. So the audience was never hard, and actually as the years went on, finding people to be in it wasn't very hard.

"The last week before the show is known as 'Hell Week' to all of the dancers. Hell Week involves lighting each piece and then several full run-throughs of the concert. It seems like you're at the high school forever. It's all that time and the last-minute changes that make it so hard. I think I was the one who titled it Hell Week."

Noel concluded her story by discussing the changes and future of community dance concerts in Steamboat. "Very little has stayed the same throughout the years. The changes have been that more people are involved. The technical ability of the dancers is much better. The costumes have gotten so much better. The dancers want to always do better than the year before.

"I have seen dances change in the sense that sometimes the ballets are better than they were in the past, or tap gets better, or modern becomes stronger. It used to be that I was the only modern choreographer. However, last year there was more modern than anything else. Generally the choreography gets better every year.

"The direction I would like to see the concert go in would be for certain things to continue. I would like them to always hire an artistic consultant and technical director. I would like the choreography to get better than it is now and see that there would be a requirement that anybody in the concert must be taking a technique class. I would like to see a choreography course and more guest teachers in Steamboat so that movement ideas continue to grow."

In 1986, Noel and her husband Terry and daughter Tara moved to Boulder. The Heftys have been involved in many community events and organizations; they will be missed by all their friends in Steamboat. Noel has been appointed to the board of directors of three dance groups since moving to Boulder. She is treasurer for the Boulder Community Dance Collective, and on the board of the Boulder Ballet Ensemble and the Jane Franklin Dance Company. This year, while Noel was unable to participate in the Steamboat Dance Concert, she did make it a point to come up to Steamboat to watch and enjoy the concert.



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JULIE FILLER

I also interviewed Julie Filler, who talks about her experiences in ballet. "The first time I was in a dance class, I think I was six or seven years old. It was in Michigan, and it was ballet. I have always taken ballet. My mom took me there just like all the other little girls, and I hated it. I think I took classes for two years. Both my parents were musicians, so they were quite anxious to see me involved in the arts. They started working me on the piano and the violin. I really hated that. So I went back to dance. I liked it when I went back.

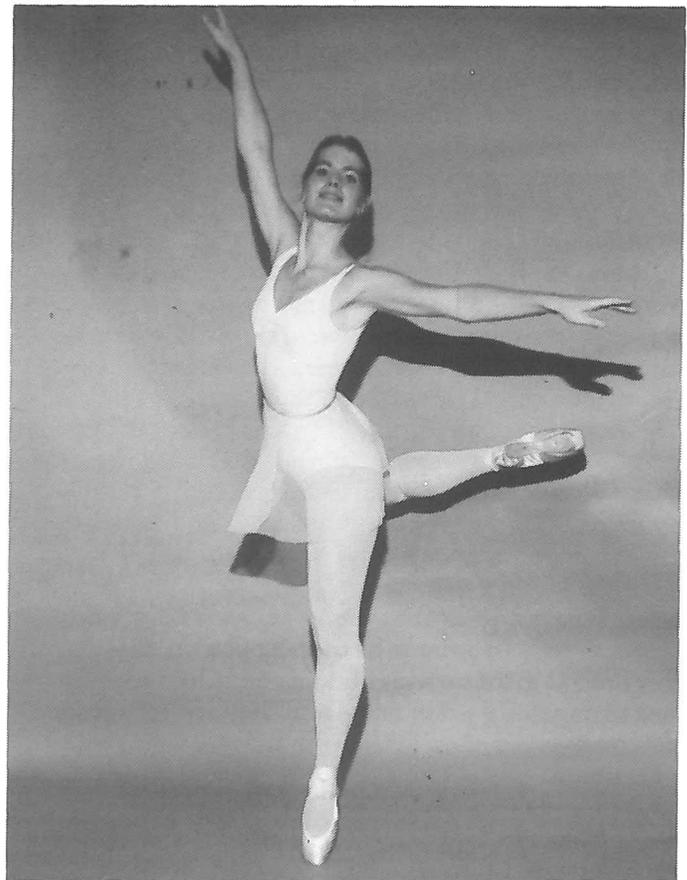
"I think I became serious when I was 11 or 12. That was in California. After I left Michigan, I trained with the Balboa Park Arts Program. It had huge ballet classes with 60 kids in them. I did not start out as a beginner since I had already had a few years of dance. It always came quickly to me; I retained a lot and started into an intermediate class and found it was something I really wanted to stick with.

"I went to a couple of professional schools. Stage 7, which was basically a jazz studio in San Diego, had some of the best ballet teachers available. One instructor who gave me the majority of my training was Lynda Yourth. She danced with the New York City Ballet. She was trained in Russian technique. I also trained at City Centre Ballet and San Diego Ballet. I did some work with them and danced with them in my late teens and early 20's.

"A lot of people took dance here and there, but when you are in ballet you have to give up a lot. It is very disappointing. I didn't do a lot of things with my friends. I never went to football games. I studied hard and was a good student. It was really important to me and my parents that I got good grades. But dancing was mainly what I did. Because of my discipline and background, I was never involved in drugs. I didn't party, and it wasn't because I thought it was wrong or bad. It's just that I couldn't. All my life I fought for discipline in dance. Why would I want to give it up to take drugs? My friends couldn't understand that.

"I took 13 classes a week, almost all ballet. I went to school in the mornings, but I didn't have to take gym classes. I would take them sometimes, but I had a written excuse to not do things that would work against my body for dance. I would start dancing at 4:30, and then take three to four classes in a row. I often took four classes in one day. That's normal for girls or guys who had the drive for it that I did. You had to do it.

"It's not as difficult for men. If you're a man and you know your right foot from your left foot and you're somewhat attractive, you have no problem. The



"ALL MY LIFE I FOUGHT FOR DISCIPLINE IN DANCE."

situation here in Steamboat is similar in that any man is given much more immediate and personal attention than women. With women it's not like that, and even more so in a big city because the competition is so extreme. Everyone is doing anything they can to be better. That's how classes are.

"Dance classes here are different. There really isn't much competition. When I was training, I went to class and didn't talk to anyone. I didn't dare open my mouth. The teacher would not stand for it, and also you didn't really have that much to say to the other person. But some friendships were formed. One of my closest friends was a woman I used to dance with. That doesn't happen all that often.

"When I go back to San Diego, I always go back to my old school, and I still see some of the girls who took classes with me. We were in our early teens back then. We're all 30 now. Many of them did not go on and do as many things as I have in dance. They just took dance classes as a hobby or a pastime after their teens. It's pleasant to see them. We talk about old times and remember that we weren't really friendly then.

"I am a competitive person; I do like competition in most everything, but not to the point where it's not friendly. So many things in the world of dance are

done with ulterior motives and the reasons behind what is said or done are not always genuine and sincere. They can be. I have had some teachers who have been fabulous. The teacher I received most of my training from intimidated me. She worked on intimidation. We had a real love-hate relationship.

"All the years I danced with her and trained with her, I was on a scholarship. Out of our whole school, there were only two women on scholarships. Twice she complimented me in eight years of training -- two times, and I would remember if there had been more. I can remember exactly what I was doing when I was complimented. When I look back, I know I was a decent dancer. I was a scholarship student. I gave it my all, but rather than encouraging her students, she worked on negative reinforcement.

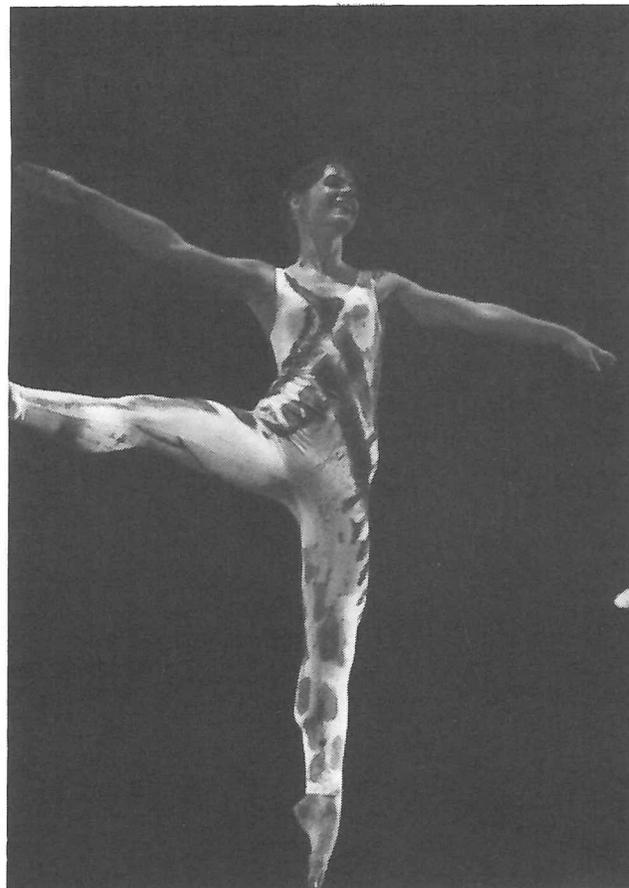
"I think part of it is that many ballet teachers are very insecure. In order to be the best at what they do, they have to grow up with blinders on. They are only good at one thing -- dancing -- and they are very good at it. So they are often insecure in the real world with real people.

"I question my own security in other parts of life sometimes, but basically I'm pretty well-rounded. I was lucky enough to have a family who encouraged me to try many different things. I was involved in art classes and rode at an English riding academy for years. My parents were supportive; they always encouraged me. It didn't matter what I was involved in. I did not have a 'ballet mother' who made sure everything was right and pushed me along. She never pushed me.

"My dad probably couldn't tell you 75 percent of the things I've done. He hasn't seen many of the performances I have done. He was just busy doing other things. I was often in another state, and they missed a lot of those performances. My mom died. They both were very busy people, but they were always supportive.

"After high school, I was dancing hard with City Centre Ballet and San Diego Ballet and at Stage 7. I went through some personal trauma, but I still kept dancing. Shortly after that I had an accident. It was in a rehearsal for *Sleeping Beauty*. Four days before the performance, my partner had me in an overhead lift. He dropped me right on the floor. I had fractures and hairline cracks on five ribs on my right side. So that had me flat on my back for six weeks. At that point my doctor said, 'Look, you can keep dancing, but it will never stop causing you pain. If you want to live with pain the rest of your life, keep it up.'

"Dancers have to have a very high tolerance for pain. Something always hurts. I can remember having blisters on every toe at once and still having to



"I LIKE TO STAY FRESH AND ON TOP OF THINGS."

perform. But I did not want to live in constant pain from an injury just so I could keep dancing at the same level. so I danced with a few semi-professional companies and started teaching.

"I am really thankful because it got to a point where I could stop everything and shift gears. I still love dance, and I'm still very involved. It's good because I am 30 years old now, and I have nine to ten years of teaching under my belt. That's quite a bit of teaching experience for a 30-year-old dancer. I have taught in a lot of schools. I mainly teach Russian technique, but I'm certified with the Royal Academy of Dance. I taught in an English school for a couple of years, so I had to learn that technique. I can teach just about anywhere. I have enough background, but I don't have a degree in dance. I have a lot more than a degree."

I asked Julie if she had any dance idols. "Mostly my teacher, Lynda Yourth. In later years I have looked up to Natalia Makarova; I think she is really amazing. I admire many people, but never had anyone I wanted to be exactly like. I am just happy being the person I am. There are many wonderful dancers whom I admire, but I'm not sure I would ever want to give up as much as is needed to achieve what they have.

"Dancers do many things to improve their opportunities. Some even go so far as to have cosmetic surgery for their profiles. Looks are extremely important in ballet. You can get away with a lot of things in jazz and modern, but in ballet if you don't have a certain look -- long neck, strong features, and you have to have a chin. It's so funny, but if you look at ballet dancers they all have good chins. They are very particular. They all have that same quality about them.

"Many dancers also get into drugs to keep up with everyone else. In my school years, people were doing a lot of speed and cocaine. I just never thought it was worthwhile. I have seen dancers burned out to the point that they are on so many drugs that they are losing technique when they think they are gaining."

Julie described all the moving around she did before she came to Steamboat Springs. "After I broke my ribs in San Diego, I moved to the San Francisco area. I danced with the Santa Rosa Ballet and Dance Theater. I then moved on to Florida. My parents were living in Montana at that time. My mother was very ill. So I finally ended up moving to Montana to be near them. I found my life losing all direction. I put so much time and energy into my mother, which was good because I needed to do that, but I stopped paying attention to the things I needed to, such as self-growth and dance.

"When I'm not in dance, my personality changes. I am not a very fun person to be around. My dad really encouraged me to move. 'Why don't you just move away, not too far this time, but it would be better for you,' he said. I have always loved Boulder since 1975 when I visited friends there, so that's where I moved. I didn't dance too much there, only a couple of classes a week at Ballet Arts. Less than a year later, I came up to Steamboat to go skiing, and I fell in love with it. So I moved here in 1982-83."

I asked Julie when she got into the local dance theater. "The way I got involved in Steamboat Dance Theater was very funny. Deb Snyder (now Deb Wheaton) used to be the ballet teacher in Steamboat. She just had twin daughters when I moved here. I looked in the phone book for dance. I only saw Rocky Mountain School of Dance for Kids. So I didn't know there was any dance up here. At that point I was backing off from dance a little bit so I wasn't really concerned about the lack of dance. My mother had just died when I moved up here. I was pretty wrapped up in that, full of grief.

"I met a girl here, and we were talking about our pasts. I told her about my past involvement with dance and so she said, 'There are ballet classes here at the Depot.' I didn't know what the Depot was. So I called the Depot. The classes were taught by



**"WE ARE ALL PASSIONATE ABOUT
WHAT WE DO."**

Martha Lou Davis. Martha Lou had taken over teaching for Deb, and she didn't have much experience. She knew she didn't, but she didn't want to see ballet just die. She kept up the class as best she could although only three or four people would come.

"So I came to one class. After class, she looked at me and said, 'I should not be teaching this class; you should be teaching it.' She had no knowledge that I had been a teacher. I said, 'I really don't want to be a teacher again.' I just didn't want to get that involved again! Martha said, 'That's life, because I'm not teaching you.' So she promptly went and had some surgery that she had been waiting to have. So I taught the class. She ended up moving from this area. I just stayed with it. It's been four years now.

"In the last few years, the changes in the dance theater have been pretty large. When I first came to Steamboat, the ballet people and jazz people would not speak to each other. When they were in concerts together, they had their separate dressing rooms. Nobody took each other's classes. The jazz dancers thought ballet was too boring and restrictive; the ballet people acted like jazz wasn't real dancing.



"At that time, all the ballet performances were pretty classical-oriented. I like doing a variety of different things because I have done *Swan Lake* too many times. I don't have to have everything strictly classical. In performance I like surprises. I love modern dance and have been involved in it for five to six years now. Most of the pieces I do are a mixture of modern and ballet. There will be classical movement with very strange music or very strange movement with classical music. I like to stay fresh and on top of things. That's why I go away and take as many workshops as I can in other states. I keep dancing to keep my technique fresh.

"Dance has changed a lot because Polly Cogswell (the woman who has kept jazz flourishing in Steamboat for years) and I have really made a strong effort to mesh our strong personalities together and to encourage people to take all the different techniques they can. As a result, the quality of the dancers in Steamboat has skyrocketed. If you look at a dance concert tape of a few years ago, a majority of the dancers are beginners. If you look at last year's tape, a majority of the dancers are well above intermediate. That's quite a jump. You are getting people now who take jazz, ballet, and modern dance.

"The future of ballet in Steamboat is good. The program is growing. I have many students who come and take ballet, not because they want to be ballet dancers, but because they want to be good dancers. That's what I stress in my classes. I think once people started to understand that I wasn't going to make them be in the *Nutcracker*, they relaxed a lot. Also, when a lot of the jazz and modern people started coming and taking ballet, they saw their technique in their own dance form.

"There is always conflict. You get artistic personalities and dancers with insecurities and hangups -- strong temperaments. But you will find a group of people that really stick together. Even when personalities have a hard time meshing, there is still a tremendous amount of love and respect. Not everyone gets along, but we are all passionate about what we do. Those are things dancers all have in common.

"But what makes Steamboat Dance Theater unique is the internal support system we all share. Our concerts reflect our enthusiasm, our passion for our art. For a town of 6,000, we have an amazing amount of talent and also people who love to watch dance. In the last year Steamboat Dance Theater, Dance Visions Repertory Ensemble and my own group of students have put on six major performances, along with participating in many other local events. As a dancer and a dance teacher, I have many blessings to count right here in Steamboat."

ROBIN GETTER

Robin Getter is a choreographer and is teaching dance in Steamboat. "When I was a teenager, I danced ballet and modern dance (Martha Graham Technique), and I lived outside the city of New York in New Jersey. The teachers that I had were pretty hard-core and professional type teachers. They wanted me to get serious about dance when I was about 16. I looked at my other friends, and they were going hiking and biking, and I would have to be in a studio five days a week. So I didn't go for it and did not dance much until after college.

"I got into African dance about 1977. I was taking jazz at a studio in Burlington, Vermont. One teacher offered an African-Haitian class, and it was really fun. It was a real athletic kind of dancing. At the time, I was not having a lot of success with jazz. I was okay, but never at the front of the class. So I worked hard as a student in this studio. This was after college and it just clicked with me, that one class, and I took it real consistently for the next year or two. I started teaching my friends what I was learning. I had a couple of black friends who encouraged me to learn some, and so I kept going with it.

"I learned a lot more in New York City and moved to Colorado. The following summer I went back to New York and took classes for three months at the Alvin Alley Dance Theater. I studied hard on a technique called Katherine Dunham Technique which is Afro-American technique. She developed it to try to get the black people out of the ghettos and into more productive kinds of things. It was a real political thing to get the kids up and out of the situation, to help them enjoy their bodies and get them into the arts instead of being stuck in the ghettos. So it was political motivation that made this woman start her

dance company. Katherine Dunham and her students have since been teaching the technique.

"My teacher was Lavelian William; she was about 63 years old. She would do all the movements and teach us songs from Nigeria and Haiti. We would do the whole dance with drumming; it was intense and difficult. Then we would learn these songs that we would all sing. It was really amazing; now every year when I go back to New York, I take classes.

"One woman, Joan Peters, had a walking stick. It was carved black ebony wood. She would pound it on the floor next to our feet. You didn't want to mess up. I took some Brazilian dance classes and other Haitian dance classes. Out of that I developed my own technique here in Steamboat. In a town like Steamboat, you can really let yourself grow. So that has been the greatest part about Steamboat for me.

"During the summer of 1987, I went back to New York State and took an Afrodance camp they have there. In ten days we had 12 teachers, all from different countries. They taught us all different types of drumming rhythms and dances from different countries. African dance is not just one kind of dance; it's a unique style in each country. So I really learned a lot. I tried to keep up with those people. Maybe I'll go to Africa someday, or at least to Jamaica."

I asked if the New York music is just drums. "Not only drums but shakers, wood sticks, and percussion instruments. In New York, my class had six to eight drummers. In the studio it was very intense. You could really get into it. I had a 60-year-old dance instructor up in Woodstock who would teach us a dance, and we would repeat the same thing across the floor for half an hour. There would be drumming students there too.

"He would teach the drumming students the rhythms because there are four or five different rhythms that go to each dance, called 'poly rhythms.' He would just drum and wouldn't speak to us. He showed us the movement and taught them the drumming. We would do it over and over. It's an old way of teaching dance because it's so internal. He never gave individual criticism because everyone wanted to get a sense of what he was into.

"A lot of ballet and modern dance will have a live pianist, so you can tell the musician to speed it up or start again from the beginning. It's so much nicer to have live people there. African drums are really complicated. They believe that the drums are the communicators of the spirit. The spirit is out there and there is the dancer, and the drum brings the spirit into the dancer.



"I FEEL LIKE I CAN EXPRESS MY STRENGTH AND SHOW IT INSTEAD OF TRYING TO HIDE IT."

"Every time you dance, you thank the drummers and the drum. The ground that the drum was on, you bow down and touch it and say 'thank you.' In my Steamboat class, there is no drummer, so we get into a circle and finish the class together thanking each other because we don't have any drummers. It is a very respectful sort of thing. You can get into a trance dancing around like crazy, with everyone centering over to the drummers. Singing is very much a part of the whole thing, too. Learning the songs helps you with the rhythm.

I asked Robin what type of dancer she admires. "Clara Parker Robinson is one person I do look up to because she has integrated dance with a political theme. I also look up to Alvin Alley, but he is not a dancer. If I were black, I would try to get into his company; at this point I think I might be able to.

"Even though I'm older, I feel my skills have gotten very good. If you're white, you have to be exceptional to try to get into a black dance company. They have a couple of white dancers, but not many. I would go to the city when I was in high school and watch Judith Jameson dance. I looked up to her for a while."

Robin was teaching her friends dance back in Vermont when she decided to move to Steamboat in 1980. "I tried to offer a course at Colorado Mountain College, but nobody signed up. So then I started



**"LEARNING THE SONGS HELPS YOU
WITH THE RHYTHM."**

taking jazz with Polly Cogswell and meeting some of the other dancers.

"They had Art in the Park during the summer, and I did a little solo dance there. This was about five or six years ago, and people started hearing about it. So the next semester people started to sign up for the class. I have been teaching for about five years, and now I have a little crew that's been with me for at least three years.

"I majored in education; I'm a certified high school teacher, so that is why I feel teaching is my future. Teaching dance is really great for me; I like teaching a lot. That's what I was trained to do in college. Teaching is just as much fun as choreographing and performing.

"I never thought I would be this much into dance or even sports because I was never athletic when growing up. That is what my parents can't believe. They ask, 'Where did you get this in you?' I would always try to get out of gym and now I teach aerobics and total ski fitness plus Afro dancing. I made this change when I was about 24.

"My friends got me teaching dance. I felt kind of inhibited when I was dancing back East, because I didn't have the right body type. I was not tall, with legs three miles long, I couldn't do the splits, and wasn't skinny. So I felt a little out of place. Then I got into ethnic dancing, and my friends wanted to learn.

"I try to keep my classes fun because most of the ethnic dancing is done at parties. It's not done in a dance studio with mirrors. It's done for fun. It's done to tell a story. I got into Afro dance because people can get involved. I have learned some really authentic things. I don't have the drummer, which is a major part of Afro dance. So I try to make it a little jazzier and use music that people can relate to. For example, I use Bob Marley or Talking Heads. Those are my two favorites. People can snap their fingers and relate so it's not so shocking or different."

Robin talked about her experience with S.D.T. and some of the changes she has seen over the last few years. "I have seen it grow. There have been a lot more people involved. It used to be a very small group of five or ten people plus the dancers. They have been through many changes trying to keep the traditional ways. They try to go with the flow of what other people want to do.

"There was a big split between the ballet group and the jazz group when I first moved here. Now we have a new ballet dancer, Julie Filler, who has helped blend things together a little bit more, which is nice.

"We have a really strong modern department with Debbie Anko teaching and Amy Tumminelo; that has really broadened the dance program. It used to be just jazz, tap and ballet. So we have really grown.

"Now my African stuff has brought in different kinds of people. I was appointed vice-president of the dance theater two years ago, which changed things as I was a newcomer. I have been really involved these last two years since I was elected.

"As vice-president, it has helped my personality and perspective. It has changed for the better, but it's still hard when everybody has their own interest. Artists just don't compromise. They want to see it their way. If they did compromise, they would be commercial artists. So the dance theater is a hard group.

"I would like to see more unique original movement come out. I have used a lot of similar-style movement, and would like to push myself to get new stuff out. I don't have that many dancers. So the ones I have I'm going to push to excellence -- make them work to look great and impress everyone.

"Dancing is a challenge to keep your mind focused so you can remember your next step. I'm really proud of what I'm doing; I have a great desire to work with the audience. I feel great and I love it when the lights come on! I like to smile, show off, and do everything right. I feel I can express my strength and show it instead of trying to hide it. I'm choreographing now, and it's pretty exciting; I'm proud of my work."