

Paper Swan' joins ballet

By KIM TYSON
Battalion Campus Editor

Dressed in velvets and brocade, a lady-in-waiting stood before a packed Rudder Auditorium last Thursday knowing that with one year of ballet training behind her she could ruin "Swan Lake."

The idea seemed at first absurd. As a six-year-old, I dreamed of becoming a ballerina during a girl's standard year of ballet lessons. But my lack of skill, plus my mother's dislike for the ballet teacher put an end to that. Or so I thought.

The chairman of the Opera and Performing Arts Society (OPAS) delivered what she considered a "bombshell" to members last week. Needed for extras in the ballet: one woman, four men. Average sizes.

In the spirit of George Plimpton, why not live out a dream? I volunteered.

Costume fitting and rehearsal began at 3 p.m. before the night's performance. My colleagues, four young men railroaded into volunteering, met me near the stage in the lobby.

When we came in, the crew was in the middle of rehearsal practicing steps and leaps on stage. Ben Stevenson, artistic dance director, or "head honcho" as one performer said, was giving instructions. He soon began to hum parts of "Swan Lake" as each dancer took turn doing the steps and jumps. Some giggled and laughingly tried to fulfill his commands and amuse the rest of the cast.

Most of the members of the ballet group were in their early 20's although the leading dancer, Andrea Dehnel, will be 40 next year.

At 21, I felt like a has-been. Childhood ballerina dreams had faded me by.

Knowing my experience with ballet, I thought I'd probably end up a free or fake swan for the performance. But the heavy velvet dress and headpiece made me feel less a swan and more a true member of the cast.

Any amount of frivolity I perceived at the afternoon rehearsal was dead that evening.

Forty-five minutes before the performance, I arrived to dress and hear more about my part.

But the stage this time was filled with sweating, huffing puffing dancers. They lined up along four pipe bars, stretching their limbs in splits and extensions. None dressed to perform.

"One, two, three," Stevenson barked as the dancers sweat.

"Half hour, everyone, half hour till places," he said at the end.

In the women's dressing room, black trunks filled with assorted leotards and ballet slippers covered the floor.

Tackle boxes of mascara, eyelashes, liners and eye shadows. Lighted mirrors one after the other around the dressing room. Clothes racks of sequined, ruffled outfits in the center.

An intercom was like the tick of a bomb. Someone would come over to announce the minutes left. You could hear the orchestra warming up and the crowd filling in.

A few stragglers quickly put on their outfits, adjusted straps and hurried to the wings. I groped from backstage darkness to find them.

The ballet had started.

A man in front of a conductor's stand spoke into his headphone near a lighted board.

"Five, four, three, two, one, light cue five," he counted down like a rocket launch announcer. "Light cue six, go."

Four spear-carrying guards wearing gray tights and helmets arrived. One seemed hypnotized by the performance. "This is something," he said. "I sure wish I had a front row seat." They stood together, spellbound.

An apprentice dancer in the wings imitated the movements on stage, nodding her head to the beats of the music.

One girl rushed to the stage after performing a dance. "I knew I forgot something," she said grabbing an arm ruffle with exasperation. Back at the dressing room she mentioned paying a fine for the missing piece of costume.

The act ended and the "swans" powdered up for the next act.

"Places, upstage right," came the anonymous voice again. "Watch out where the fog is coming out. It may be slippy."

Groans from the room. "It may be me, the way my night's going," one dancer chimed in.

The flock of swans gathered at a rosin box to powder their shoes. An old folding table became an exercise bar.

"Go" shouted one stage hand as another pulled the curtain rope up hand over hand.

Vodehanl finished a graceful solo on stage. "God, I've got to catch my breath," she said as soon as she got to the wings of the stage. "First, the music slow, then fast." Her "prince" throws up his hands.

I suddenly realized my moment of stardom was coming up. I stop the questions about dancers and start them about me.

Shock of shocks. The last girl in El Paso nearly didn't make it off the stage, one dancer confided, laughing. I started worrying.

No step-by-step-rehearsal, just a quick run-down about where to be.

My "performance" was a parade behind two dancer "ladies-in-waiting" and the queen. I smiled nervously as I tried to look like a pro.

But I realized by peers were true professionals on stage. I stood there



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worrying about whether my folded hands should cross left over right, or right over left.

The sweat sprays from the "prince" like a sprinkler as he turns. Ballet being difficult, of all things. They sweat like football players.

But next was when the El Paso girl blew it. I looked to see my cure from other dancers. The throne "blows up" with a gun powder smoke screen and I throw my hands up in mock horror.

My grand performance was over. I didn't shake the Earth. The program didn't even say we existed.

I walked to the dressing room and took off the dress and headpiece. The thick eyeliner and eyeshadow next.

Average Jane Doe, junior, journalism major walks past the Corps area to my dorm room.

"What if..." I began to think. I looked down at my bow legs.

"Oh, well..."

Say nation losing productivity lead

United Press International
MENLO PARK, Calif. — Research and development continues to decline in the United States, a decline that threatens a lower standard of living, according to Stanford Research Institute's magazine.

The quarterly cites a number of economic indicators, suggesting that the nation is losing its lead in productivity and technological innovation. A slowdown in innovation could mean fewer jobs and less trade overseas.

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Conference requests 'funds' meeting

United Press International
HOUSTON—The National Women's Conference, financed by a highly controversial \$5 million federal appropriation, called Monday President Carter and Congress to provide "sufficient funds" for yet another such meeting of American women.

Conservatives angered by the decision promptly staged a walk-out before the historic four-day conference was scheduled to adjourn. The protesters left singing a chorus of "God Bless America."

Does the country want more of this? asked conservative floor leader Joan Gubbins, a state senator from Indiana. "Does the country want more tax money spent for one point of view?"

Feminists dominated the conference, which passed 25 proposals including support for the Equal Rights Amendment, abortion, and lesbian rights. Only one proposal by the leadership was defeated.

Conference leader Bella Abzug offered a personal defeat when the meeting rejected her proposal for a special federal women's department — the only major issue that divided the feminist majority.

Many feminists joined with conservatives and members of the lesbian caucus to defeat the women's department. Some lesbians indicated they were motivated by bitterness at Abzug for her original reluctance to discuss lesbian rights at the conference.

Eleanor Smeal, president of the National Organization for Women, said most opponents of the women's department simply did not like the

idea that women's concerns would be "ghettoized" in the government.

Feminist leader Gloria Steinem spoke on behalf of the proposed department, contending it would be nothing more than a small agency

for women's advocacy at the cabinet level.

The conference of some 2,000 delegates—the first of its kind in American history—has long been under attack by conservatives for

the expenditure of millions of federal tax dollars to promote feminist causes.

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