

A look at theater, art, vocal music and dance

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Some Aggies add vocal music to school

by Ann Ramsbottom
Battalion staff

Texas A&M doesn't offer a degree in music, but that hasn't stopped over 230 Aggies from including music in their schedules.

Students from every imaginable background come together several hours each week to do what they do best together — make music. The Singing Cadets, the Reveliers, Century Singers, Women's Chorus and the MSC-recognized Voices of Praise each represent the University with their own style of music.

"We aren't a music school," says Patricia P. Fleitas, assistant vocal music conductor, "but we still try and compete with the quality of other university vocal music programs.

"Often, when a music program is offered," she says, "the University choirs become the dumping grounds for those who just want to sing. Not here."

More than 90 years of tradition and excellence stand behind the Singing Cadets, the all-male glee club directed by Robert L. Boone. The group traces its roots to 1894 when it

was known as the Texas A&M Glee Club. Since its beginning, the group has developed a reputation equalled by few.

The Singing Cadets present Texas A&M in song to many different audiences. The group has become a standard at campus events, ranging from the University's centennial in 1976 to various dedications of new structures on campus.

The singers have appeared in every major Texas city many times and performed in dozens of smaller towns.

During the past 20 years, the Singing Cadets have performed in the White House, on the Ed Sullivan and Mike Douglas television shows and for seven consecutive years appeared on the nationally-televised Miss Teenage America Pageant.

The singers performed in Romania in 1974 on an "Ambassadors for Friendship" tour, participated in an International Music Festival in Hawaii in 1979 and traveled to Mexico this summer to compete in an international music festival. They will be on tour in Texas for a week in January.

The 60 to 70 male members of the Singing Cadets come from

A&M's military and non-military students. The members rehearse at least four-and-a-half hours each week and must maintain a 2.0 grade point ratio. In addition to time spent in rehearsal, the Cadets are on the road for 50 to 60 performances a year.

The Singing Cadets perform a variety of music including: popular tunes, Broadway hits, operatic selections, church hymns, patriotic pieces and novelty numbers.

The Cadet's director and Texas A&M music coordinator, Robert L. Boone, is the 12th director of the Singing Cadets. Beginning his tenure Sept. 1, 1960, Boone has been with the group for 22 years.

Boone stresses a truism on which he personally relies: "The only time a man fails is the last time he tries."

Pianist Margaret McArthur accompanies the Singing Cadets. "Momma Mac," as she is affectionately known, has become a popular addition to the group. She has taught A&M's only music appreciation course for the past nine years.

Another group conducted by Boone is the Reveliers, a vocal

jazz ensemble. The group, made up of 12 singers and four alternates performs jazz, popular and swing music at 15 to 20 performances a year.

In addition to the vocalist, a lead guitar, bass guitar, piano, drums and occasionally some wind instruments accompany the group. The group has worked with a variety of other instrumentation.

Fleitas, assistant vocal music coordinator, has directed the Century Singers and the Women's Chorus since her arrival in the fall of 1978. In addition to her choir work, she also directs the MSC Madrigal Dinners Program.

The Century Singers, a mixed choir of approximately 60 members, have been in existence since 1971. When women began to enroll at Texas A&M, a choral ensemble that included both men and women students was inevitable.

Initially called the New Tradition Singers, the choir was renamed in 1976 to commemorate the University's centennial.

The Century Singers perform a wide array of musical styles at approximately 20 performances a year. Most of their perform-

ances are local and include church services, conventions, campus events and special concerts.

The Century Singers occasionally hold open rehearsals in the MSC lounge for students to listen to. An open rehearsal is scheduled for Saturday, Oct. 29, before the home football game.

"Due to the nature of the beast, we have a lot of music to select from," Fleitas says, referring to the large amount of literature available to mixed choirs. The Century Singers sing popular, classical, sacred and jazz.

"Mixed choruses are a dime a dozen," Fleitas says. "Our goal is to achieve choral excellence in a non-fine arts university."

As with the other choirs, the Century Singers rehearse at least four-and-a-half hours a week and receive no academic credit for their efforts.

The Women's Chorus is the youngest group and the "newer tradition" since A&M's conversion to a co-ed campus. Founded in the spring of 1979, the group started with 33 women and now has 55 to 60 members per semester.

"The Women's Chorus is a (see VOCAL, page 15)

Dance programs growing since 1972

by Nicole Williams
Battalion reporter

Dance has come a long way at Texas A&M since the first class was offered 11 years ago by the Department of Health and Physical Education.

The dance program started with the hiring of Kay Don in 1972. She was the first woman in the physical education activity program with the qualifications to teach dance, says assistant department head Emil Mamaliga.

One section each of modern dance and folk/square dance was taught by Don in the annex section of G. Rollie White Coliseum.

That semester 42 people out of about 5,600 in the entire activity program enrolled in the dance classes. Three of those 42 were male students.

The next two years saw the addition of two female faculty members to the staff.

"We hired them with the primary philosophy of increasing the variety of offerings in the dance area," Mamaliga says.

By Spring 1975 ten sections of dance, including modern, social, folk/square and aerobics were being taught in the newly expanded coliseum.

Today the department offers 34 sections of dance. Ballet, jazz, country and western and tap have been added to the four previously offered programs. Intermediate classes are offered for

ballet, jazz, aerobics and modern dance.

Along with the increase in number of sections and number of dance styles is an increase in the number of students participating in the program, Mamaliga says.

According to Fall 1983 figures, the number of students enrolled in the dance division of the physical education department has increased from 42 to over 1,100 participants. Approximately 20 percent of the students are male.

"These increases really go hand in hand... the dance division would not have been expanded if we had not felt the need shown by the growing number of students interested (in dance)," he says.

New teachers, teaching in the areas they are most skilled, have been added to the staff over the years and include men as well as women.

Joe DeBella, wrestling coach and weight trainer, teaches social dance. Lynn Berry, lecturer, teaches jazz and modern dance. Ginny-Lib Sulzer, lecturer and director of the dance division, teaches ballet, tap and folk dance. Two graduate assistants, Ann Poteet and Renee Vermalen, divide the aerobics classes between themselves, with Poteet also teaching square dance and Vermalen also teaching country and western dance.

"Our instructors are well

qualified," Sulzer says. She says all the teachers have had extensive training in their specific areas.

Most of the classes are held in East Kyle where the spacious facilities include mirrored walls lined with dance barres and a wooden floor.

These facilities also are used by non-academic dance organizations that offer evening classes for students interested in spending additional time in formal dance class.

Dance Arts Society, the largest campus organization offering dance classes, uses the facilities Monday through Thursday nights and has an active membership of over 200 people.

Vicki Tallas, a junior marketing major from Sugarland, is president of the society and says anyone can join.

"Anyone who's ever wanted to dance can come in and learn in a non-pressured atmosphere," says Berry, adviser to the group.

The society offers classes in tap, ballet, jazz, modern, technique and aerobics. Teachers for these classes are recruited from the Bryan-College Station area, although the teachers usually are students at the University.

Every spring the group gives a performance.

When the group first began in 1976, it performed on the cement stage at the Grove. Berry and

Tallas agree that the group has come a long way.

A new dance organization, the Health and Physical Education Dance Company, was organized last spring by two physical education dance teachers. Berry, one of the creators, says this program offers a more concentrated approach to dance.

"We decided there was a need for a more professional dance approach," Berry says.

Berry says the 22-member group practices Monday through Thursday and on weekends. Those interested may talk with her about auditioning for the group.

The Free University program offers country and western dance classes for students interested in improving their skills.

Jana Scott, a senior accounting major from Amarillo and chairman of the committee, says the program offers classes in aerobic fitness, jitterbug and beginning and advanced country and western dance.

The program currently has enrolled over 1000 students, and Scott says she believes the program will continue to grow.

Another group called the Aggie Allemanders offers fun times, good dancing and new friends for the serious and not-so-serious square dancer.

President Mark Miller says the group dances on Monday evenings at the Pavilion and

anyone may join. Miller calls the Allemanders' style of dance a "modern western" square dance.

Caller for the group, Larry Astal, teaches the beginning classes prior to the club's regular dance sessions. Approximately 20 students are enrolled in the beginning classes in addition to the club's 25 members.

As far as the future of dance here is concerned, Mamaliga and Sulzer say they hope it won't be too long before the department offers a program for certification in dance. This would enable a student majoring in physical education to emphasize dance. How long it will take to actually implement the program has not yet been determined.

An additional goal for the department is to extend class hours from 30 minutes to an hour. Sulzer says she strongly supports this because students need at least that much time to warm up and receive proper instruction.

An increase in the number of programs offered also is being considered to make signing up for dance P.E. classes a little easier.

So, ye dancers of little faith, have hope. Dance at Texas A&M is becoming less of an Aggie joke and more of a reality. Just keep practicing your arabesques and pirouettes because dance is stayin' alive here.