

State and Local

Use of color, lights helps bring performances to life

Modern dance troupe finds audience at A&M

By Tom Reinarts

Reviewer

The Nikolais Dance Theater performed a series of modern dance pieces Tuesday night at Rudder Auditorium in a show sponsored by the MSC Opera and Performing Arts Society.

The pieces were choreographed and designed by Alwin Nikolais. Nikolais has won several awards for his works both in the United States and abroad.

In 1985 he won the Samuel H. Scripps American Dance Festival Award for lifetime contribution to modern dance.

The dance group has been touring every year since 1953 and has performed all over the world. The current members are James Murphy, Alberto Del Saz, Paula Aarons, James Aarons, Sheila Lehner, Kay Anderson, Sarah Hook, Meredith Page Manly, Sean Murphy, Spencer Nichols and Noel Reiss.

David Gregory and Nikolais composed the music for the pieces, which could best be described as new and the untheatrical. Slow and quicker rhythms were layered to accent the choreography, which contained elements of ballet, jazz, and gymnastics.

Color and lighting effects, which frequently changed from kinetic to static, combined well with the choreography to produce an interesting and enjoyable show. Viewers were allowed to form their own impressions of the meanings for each segment of the performance.

Starting the evening was "Pond," a slow dance that incorporated circular lighting on the stage as well as on the costumes.

The artists wheeled themselves around on dollies to give them a fluid motion that one might expect of creatures of the water.

"The Mechanical Organ," a duet between two male company members, followed and highlighted the incredible balance and gymnastic abilities of Murphy and Del Saz. "Velocities" created a kaleido-

scope effect with lighting on the dancers that at different times was in the shape of circles, stripes and diamonds. The dancers were arranged with the use of black cloth hangings on stage in a way that created a mirror effect among the artists.

The final dance before the intermission was "Video Game," a number that included the use of black lights and fluorescent costume colors.

"Video Game" was light-hearted and bouncy and had the appearance of the arcade game TRON.

"Graph" was the final performance of the evening, and was divided into five sections. Throughout this piece grid surfaces hanging from the ceiling and drawn on the stage itself were the central props used.

The first part of "Graph" implemented a variety of bright colors in the lighting and included most of the cast members, as did the second.

Next was a duet performed by Lehner and Del Saz that included excellent timing and team work by the two dancers. In another performance, Lehner and Hook used glass backdrops to assist in a piece that resembled the movements of the contorted hands of a clock.

The final segment of the evening included the entire cast and was done underneath a strobe light. The dancers darted back and forth between black boards that hid them from the audience.

The entire performance made the most of simple geometric patterns. Squares, circles, lines, rectangles and grids of all types were visible throughout the evening. The lighting, the props and the dance choreography were all employed to create the various shapes in a variety of interesting ways.

Audience members in the full auditorium appreciated the modern and at times avant-garde performance, which was a treat for the eyes and ears. Even those unaccustomed to the unique style of modern dance seemed to enjoy themselves.

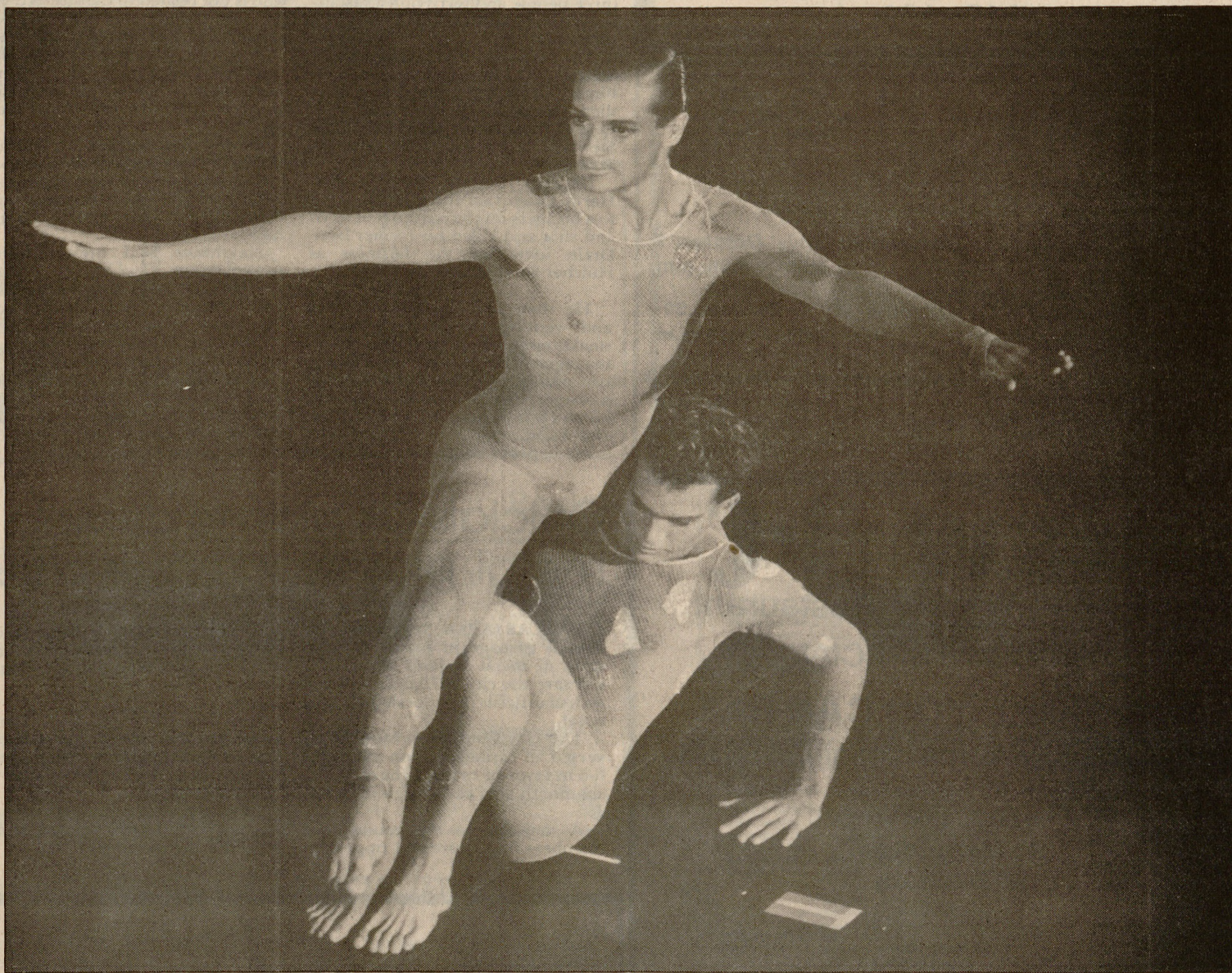


Photo by Robert W. Rizzo

James Murphy and Alberto Del Saz dance to "The Mechanical Organ" during the Nikolais Dance Theater performance.

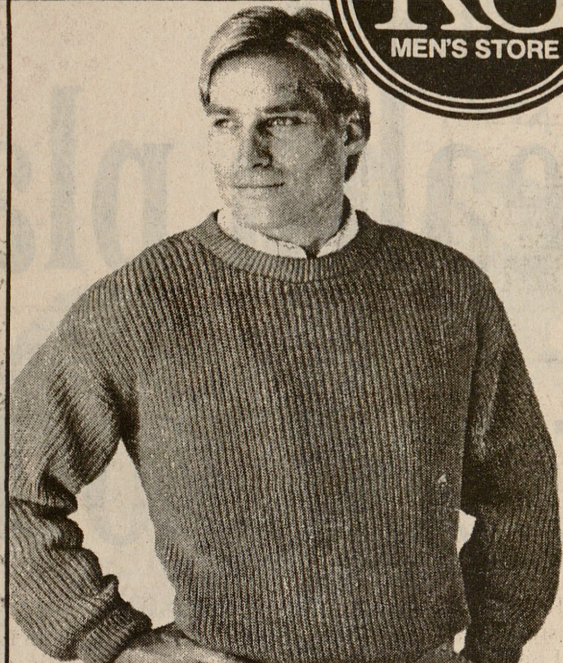
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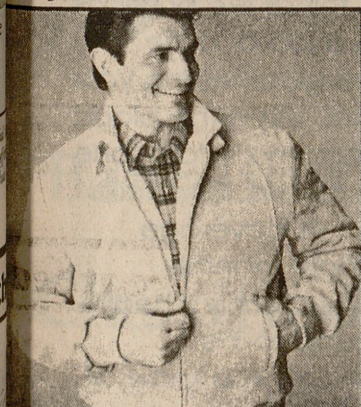
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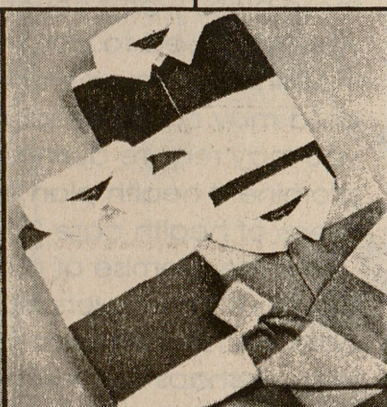
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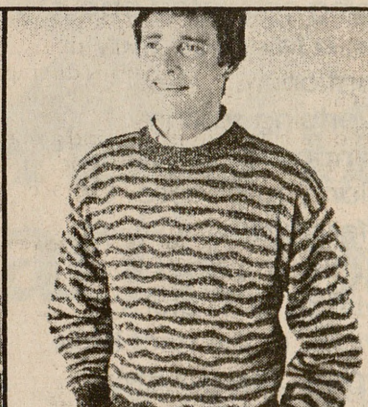
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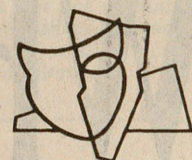
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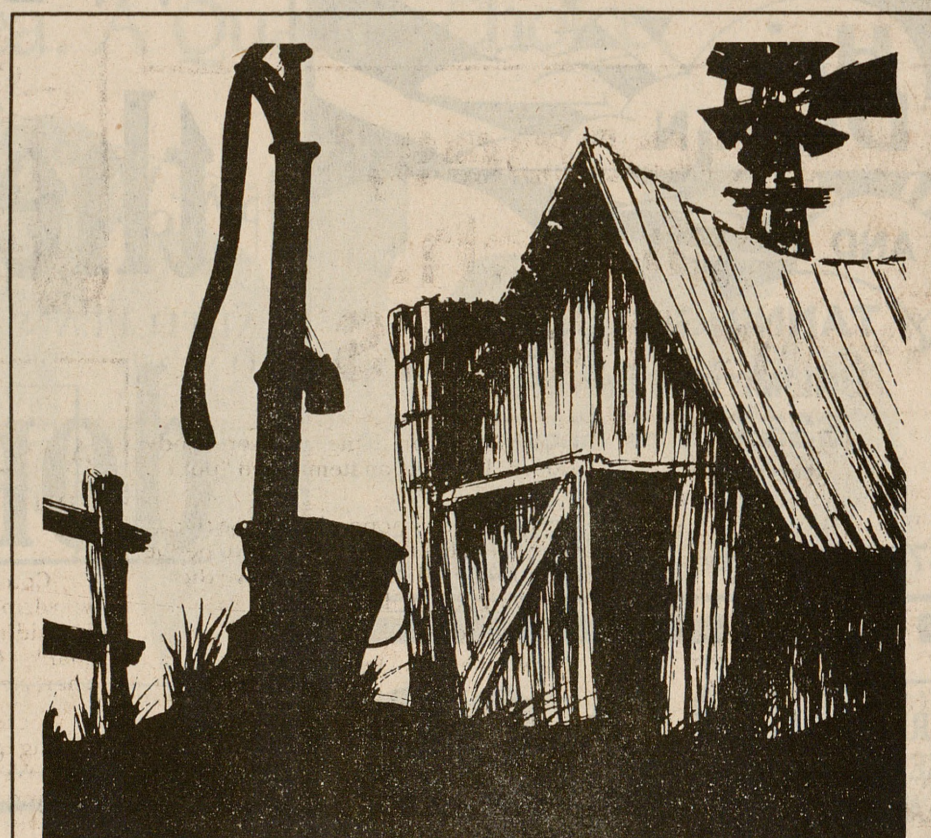
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