

Emergency #10

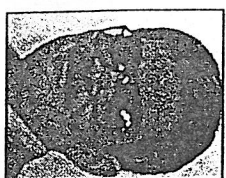
All New (dance) Stuff starts Wednesday at Market Hall

Michael Hermiston, depending on the day or the time, may be an activist, a teacher, a writer, an instrumentalist, an actor, a dancer or a choreographer.

At this moment he is in choreographer/promoter mode as he dominates a table at Dreams and Beans on Hunter Street. But it is a somewhat difficult moment in part because Hermiston the dancer/choreographer finds it very difficult, if not impossible to describe dance adequately in words...spoken or printed.

Makes for a tough interview, that problem.

But Hermiston really does want readers to see his Old Men Dancing



LEISURE GARY BALL

that can't be captured in words, but must be seen and heard.

To further complicate communication, Hermiston brings with him Synopsis #3 of Old Men Dancing to set the scene:

"A group of aging business executives, each wracked with guilt in his own way - due to selfish, money-making motivations during their careers, which compromised the social and environmental well-being of the planet."

Hermiston said the seven businessmen/dancers find themselves caught up in a swirl of issues surrounding bicycling as a major form of transportation policy in a small town.

"The business executives find themselves caught up in the whirl of this issue and each realizes that he has a chance to learn from past errors and help change the course of this small town forever," said Hermiston's brief synopsis.

Ambitious enough project for Old Men Dancing to tell this tale on stage in dance, particularly since only one of the seven performers has dance performance experience...one dance piece last year.

"None of them has much dance training or experience," Hermiston said, "but one did have clown training."

OK, degree of difficulty has just gone up a notch.

To add to the complexity, Synopsis #3 is only the most current and almost certainly not the final synopsis of the story. Synopsis #2 hasn't been shared with The Examiner.

Synopsis #1, current only a week ago - featured "a troupe of aging dancers, falsely convicted of murdering their choreographer, shipwrecked on the rocky shore of a lonely desolate island."

"Without any survival skills beyond the metaphorical, they must prove their innocence and find a way home," read Synopses #1.

Synopses #4 and #5 were expected to surface before opening night on Wednesday. And Hermiston insists he is not being willfully misleading or mischievous, that this is really the way he sees Old Men Dancing developing.

"I have this opinion about writing about dance, that I really try to discourage explaining to the audience what it's about ahead of time. In the past, the things I have said about my dance pieces are so abstract, that they're useless. This time, what I'm doing is giving a whole bunch of different scenarios, all of which fit the piece, which are totally different. So you can't latch on to a concept other than that there are seven guys between the ages of 45 and 70, I guess, who are dancing."

With his dancers having only limited dance training or experience, Hermiston said, "So, rather than go in and impose any concept or impose a dance on these guys, it's more as if I'm facilitating an environment where they feel comfort-



Seven Old Men Dancing in rehearsal, above, Michael Hermiston, right.

able in moving and in interacting with each other."

As this is going on, Hermiston said, he waited and watched for "moments of movement or moments of interaction that resonated for me. I recognized that as a sign, something that needs to grow, something that becomes larger. It really is a kind of group dynamic thing, a group evolution."

Hermiston is quite at ease with his own changing performance roles over the years, including choreographing this dance piece for men with little or no dance experience.

"I'm convinced that everybody is a dancer, that everybody is a musician, everybody is an artist. The question is whether or not you let that flow, or whether you get blocked."

But what of audience reactions. Would those who saw Old Men Dancing three or four different times see much the same performance every time, or would there be differences?

"Very subtle change, because early on the process, in the first serious floor rehearsals it was very much play. The environment was very much that we just played, that something would be thrown into the pot and people would react. And I there is a lot of merit in allowing that to happen, to continue to continue to happen. I would have been OK with that to keep it a completely open involvement thing. But the sense I had was that they (the dancers) wanted more direction, wanted to be focused in a bit, to be honed."

Old Men Dancing, Hermiston said, will be the same piece for those who see it on different nights. It isn't an improvisu, improv kind of thing.

"It will be just whether or not the dancers evolve their own emotional reactions to the dance. And if they do, then there will be another flavour to it. The movement will likely be the same but there will be a different flavour to it."

There was no opening concept to the piece, Hermiston said, "beyond the notion of having a bunch of old men and finding a dance with this group. With I think is a very freeing concept."

Freeing, it may be, but it came with its own set of special needs, including techniques to get non-dancing men comfortable with and fluid with dance and the contact

that brings. For that, "getting accustomed to touch" Hermiston got the group to start out with foot rubs and massages.

Hermiston, on piano, has done the music for Old Men Dancing, along with an original soundscape by teens Brad McBride and Kai Masaoka, a depiction of chaos based on man-made sounds. "The dancers also "do a small, short choral thing" in the centre of the piece, he said.

And Hermiston, the advocate and activist is not very far away from at least some of the Synopses he has shared. He a firm believer in the environmental, economic and social benefits of bicycling as an alternative to the internal combustion engine. He is also convinced of the need for everyone to become his/her own health advocate and an on being diagnosed with medical prob-



Clifford Skarsted, Examiner

All New Stuff - World Premieres

Program A

Water Feet by Dairika Biagal
Moth by Anya gwynne
Old Men Dancing by Michael Hermiston
Smooth Criminal by Jessica Moya-Brown
Come Here by Christy Stoeten

Program B

Unplugged by Barbara DaMello
Intimacy by Kevin Fitzmaurice and Leslie Menagh
Spear, Fan and Two Person sets by Greg Magwood
The Unveiling by Johanna Vanderpol

Program C

IRO by Nicole Bauberger and Jessica Tudos
Enit by Katie Pula
Hecate's Crown by Jessica Rowland
Third Cultures by Sherise Tan
ZZZZZZ... by Swag Dance Troupe

Program D

Full Metal Booty w. Patrick Walsh

Schedule:

Wednesday, March 20: 8 p.m.: Program A / 9:30 p.m.: Program B
Thursday, March 21: 8 p.m.: Program C / 9:30 p.m.: Program A
Friday, March 22: 8 p.m.: Program B / 9:30 p.m.: Program C / 11 p.m.: Program D
Saturday, March 23: 8 p.m.: Program A / 9:30 p.m.: Program B / 11 p.m.: Program C
Programs A-D are presented at the Market Hall Theatre.

Tickets are \$7 for one program and \$5 for each additional program. Tickets are available at the door or by phoning 745-1788 in advance for reservations.

Bonus Event: Max's Bedroom, Thursday, March 21, 8 p.m., \$5 / PWYC/ Food Bank Donation, at The Gordon Best Theatre, 216 Hunter St. W.