



Spring 5-15-1997

Zephyr Dance Ensemble All-Female Dance Troupe from Chicago To Perform at Illinois Wesleyan

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Recommended Citation

Aaron, Bob, "Zephyr Dance Ensemble All-Female Dance Troupe from Chicago To Perform at Illinois Wesleyan" (1997). *News and Events*. 6818.
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May 15, 1997

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Local
Chicago
Cent. IL**Zephyr Dance Ensemble****All-Female Dance Troupe from Chicago
To Perform at Illinois Wesleyan, May 25**

"The artists [of Zephyr] share an instinct for frolic, humor, color, flash and entertainment. . . [artistic director] Michelle Kranicke's 'Weren't We Just Kissing?' offers angry, floral-clad women at sea in relationships ingeniously underscored by Jonathan Richman."

• Sid Smith, *Chicago Tribune*, 1996

"Zephyr blended both comic and tragic elements deftly . . . the contrast in styles is dramatic."

• Lynn Voedisch, *Chicago Sun-Times*, 1992

"The company [Zephyr] takes over a room, filling the space with their presence, splashing movement across the stage as if the room were a painting."

• Effie Mihopoulos, *Chicago Reader*, 1992

BLOOMINGTON, Ill.--Chicago's only all-female contemporary dance company will perform on the Illinois Wesleyan University Quad, Friday, May 23 at 8 p.m.

The Zephyr Dance Ensemble's concert under the stars is open to the public, free-of-charge.

Zephyr's performance will wrap up a week-long artistic residency where members of the ensemble will participate in classes, ranging from creative writing and pop culture, to school and community and magic and religion.

The dance company's IWU visit is part of May Term '97, a month-long program where students study a single course intensively on campus, take a travel course, or work on an internship.

Michelle Kranicke, Zephyr's artistic director, founded the ensemble in 1989 to spur the advancement of creative women in the art of contemporary dance.

Kranicke's choreography has been described as "substantial," structurally elegant, "dance stuffed with movement," "delivering an emotional punch," and the company is seen as "strong women, aware of themselves, their bodies, and the power they have to use them."

In 1994, Zephyr created "Dancing Across State Lines," an interstate exchange of regional dance companies aimed at enriching and broadening the cultural experiences by

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presenting dance performances by local and out-of-state artists. The project includes free lecture-demonstrations and master classes, and a concert.

Jean Kerr, assistant professor of dance and movement, invited the six-member Zephyr Dance Ensemble to IWU. Kerr has known Kranicke for about four years. Previously, Kranicke has been on the IWU campus as a guest artist.

"The Zephyrs will broaden our student's perspective about dance," Kerr said, "and what it can be. The ensemble will expose our students to what it is like to be a working artist--something I hope that will come out of conversations the dancers have with students. The students will see the type of commitment it takes to be a dancer."

Kerr, member of the committee that crafted IWU's May Term, initiated the idea of having interdisciplinary artists come to campus for various May Term residencies.

"I thought IWU could be an art colony for May Term," Kerr said, "especially since so many artists and art groups have sadly lost their funding."

Commenting on the Zephyr's IWU dance concert, Kerr said: "The concert may feature part of the ensemble's repertoire, as well as dances created here during the Zephyr's residency."

The Zephyr's repertoire is designed to show the strength and beauty of women through challenging athletic movement blended with subtle and elegant gestures.

The dance company has performed extensively in Chicago and Illinois, including the Harold Washington Library Auditorium, Athenaeum Theatre, Dance Center of Columbia College, Wright College, Triton College, and Links Hall Studio. Zephyr has been presented by the Beverly Arts Center, Chicago's Next Dance Festival, Dance Chicago '95, the Weinstein Center for the Performing Arts, Blue Rider Theatre, and Puszh Studios.

Zephyr is the dance company in residence at Chicago's Holstein Park. As part of the Chicago Park District's "Arts Partners" program, Zephyr has created a comprehensive outreach program at Holstein Park, including, POWER Girls: Positive Image Through Dance, a program targeted to pre-teen and teenage girls to help raise confidence and self-esteem; an after school series of creative modern jazz classes for youngsters, ages 5-12, that incorporates the discipline of dance into each child's individual creative efforts; and "Senior's Requests," a weekly series of dance classes for senior citizens.

Zephyr has been a touring artist with Urban Gateways, Chicago's arts in education organization since 1990. In 1992, Zephyr's program, "Masters in Motion," was cited by

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Urban Gateways as the example of exemplary programming. The dance ensemble performs annually for more than 3,000 school children.

Kranicke, who earned a bachelor of arts degree from Notre Dame University, spent two years studying dance in Paris. She performs with the dance ensemble and has choreographed more than half of its repertoire. Kranicke choreographed for pop singer Celine Dion's 1994 national tour.

Other members of the Zephyr Dance Ensemble are Caroline Walsh, rehearsal director; Amanda McCann, dancer; Emily Stein, dancer; Julie Brodie, dancer; and Kari Cwik, dancer.