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Are we human, or are we dancer?

Missouri Contemporary Ballet dancers must transform themselves on the fly

BY JOHN HANSEN
THE SEDALIA DEMOCRAT

On their 2008 hit single "Human," the Killers asked "Are we human, or are we dancer?" The answer, to judge by Missouri Contemporary Ballet's "Over the Edge," is "dancer." When these human beings hit the stage, they transform into different characters for each of the six pieces in the show.

"That's what's unique about Missouri Contemporary Ballet. All of our pieces are so different, so our dancers are challenged to transform," artistic and executive director Karen Mareck Grundy said in a Friday phone interview.

"Today, for instance, they're going to rehearse at least four of the six pieces. They have to change their mindset. For one piece, they might be harried, then the next one is soft and light. They have to transform for the choreographers, switch roles, bring on a different attitude."

The theme of "Over the Edge," which will be staged Saturday at the Liberty Center, is growth, Grundy said. She launched the company five years ago, thinking that Columbia was big enough to support professional dance. She guessed right, but she's not resting on her toe shoes. Her goal for the future is to tour more, both near and far, and she's happy to bring MCB to Sedalia for the first time.

"I brought in two choreographers that aren't in Columbia," Grundy said. "Kiesha Lalama-White (of Point Park University in Pittsburgh) brought in a piece called 'Wish,' and it's about shedding yourself of personal barriers and the celebration of freedom. The other person I brought in was Jennifer Medina out of St. Louis to do



Fernando Rodriguez and Genevieve McGrath will perform as part of Saturday's Missouri Contemporary Ballet show at the Liberty Center. PHOTOS COURTESY OF RECESS INC.



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Karen Mareck Grundy

'Sacred Vessels,' which is about a sense of positivity and joy and hope. And then my resident choreographer, Shannon Lee West, has set a new piece. It's pretty edgy and different and fun, technical and athletic. And we'll do three pieces from our repertoire."

"Over the Edge" will emphasize the "contemporary" part of

MCB, Grundy said.

"I wouldn't say that any piece that we do is traditional," she said. "Obviously, the classical is the base of all dance. In order for these dancers to be able to execute, they have to be very technically trained, but then they have to be able to move. A lot of times ballerinas can't move like we require, so it's hard to find the right dancers for the company."

Although "Over the Edge" won't feature any modern pop songs like "Human" — which Grundy admitted would be a great song to dance to — one of the pieces, "Unbreakable Code," will feature a string quartet arrangement of a song by the rock band Tool.

"It's a kick-butt show, appropriate for all ages," Grundy said. "Every single person will find something that they love in this show. People get scared by ballet, but they're not going to see 'Swan Lake' or 'The Nutcracker.'"

It's appropriate that MCB shies away from the traditional ballet classics, because Grundy herself took a nontraditional route to this point. Whereas many dancers start out in a studio or company environment and later do shows in Las Vegas and other entertainment-themed cities, Grundy actually started dancing

in Vegas. At age 3, no less.

"I was born and raised in Las Vegas, and it was inevitable that I would get into dancing," she said. "When I got out of high school, I started dancing in shows in Vegas, and I danced in shows for 11 years. During that time I also worked with different companies throughout Vegas. Although I was dancing every night, my artistic outlook was to work with companies."

In 2000, she took a teaching job at the Columbia Performing Arts Centre, and five years later, she started MCB at age 34, which is somewhat young to transition from dancer to director.

"I wasn't ready to stop dancing when I moved here, but I knew in my heart I'd excel at being a director," she said.

And the key to growing the company, as "Over the Edge" suggests, is to keep moving and keep taking on new roles — and to hire performers who are always ready to transform from "human" into "dancer."

"I'm still learning, that's for sure," Grundy said. "I certainly don't pretend I know how to do this. Every day is a learning process."

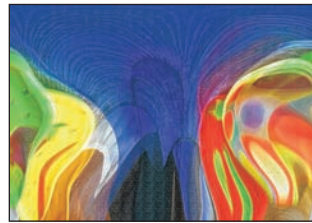
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IF YOU GO

What: Missouri Contemporary Ballet's "Over the Edge"
When: 7:30 p.m. Saturday
Where: Liberty Center, 111 W. Fifth St., Sedalia
Tickets: \$15
Phone: 827-3228, 826-2899
Websites: liberty.maca.net, missouricontemporaryballet.com

ENTERTAINMENT

shorts



SUBMITTED PHOTO
New work by Sedalia artist Faith Bemiss will be featured on Saturday.

ART BEMISS, IMHAUSER TO BE AT DELI

Sedalia photographer and writer Faith Bemiss and Sedalia author Becky Carr Imhauser will be at a meet-the-artist event from noon to 2 p.m. Saturday at the Copper Wolfe Deli, 420 S. Ohio Ave.

Bemiss will be exhibiting her new line of abstract photography and presenting her new portfolio of abstractions.

Imhauser will be signing her book, "All Along Ohio Street Sedalia, Mo."

Cooper Wolfe will celebrate this event with an open house and a drawing for a free lunch. Refreshments will be served.

For more information, call 851-0075.

KAYSINGER ART WINNERS NAMED

Kaysinger Conference High School Art Contest results were recently announced. They are as follows:

Colored pencil: Garrett Kelchner, Sacred Heart, first place; Maria Lemus, La Monte, second; Deaven Kaiser, Smithton, third; Alex Murray, Lincoln; fourth.

Graphite: Emily Callahan, Cole Camp, first; Ron Callahan, Northwest, second; Alvaro Dominguez, Sacred Heart, third; Tina Craig, Lincoln, fourth; Courtney Fischer, Sacred Heart, Laci Wilson, Stover, Ty Roberts, Cole Camp, honorable mention.

Pastel: Haylea Smith, Sacred Heart, first; Adriana Chobanu, Smithton, second; Madelyn Parkhurst, Northwest, third; Morgan Parkhurst, Northwest, fourth; Kristen Flatters and Emily Anstine, both of Windsor, honorable mention.

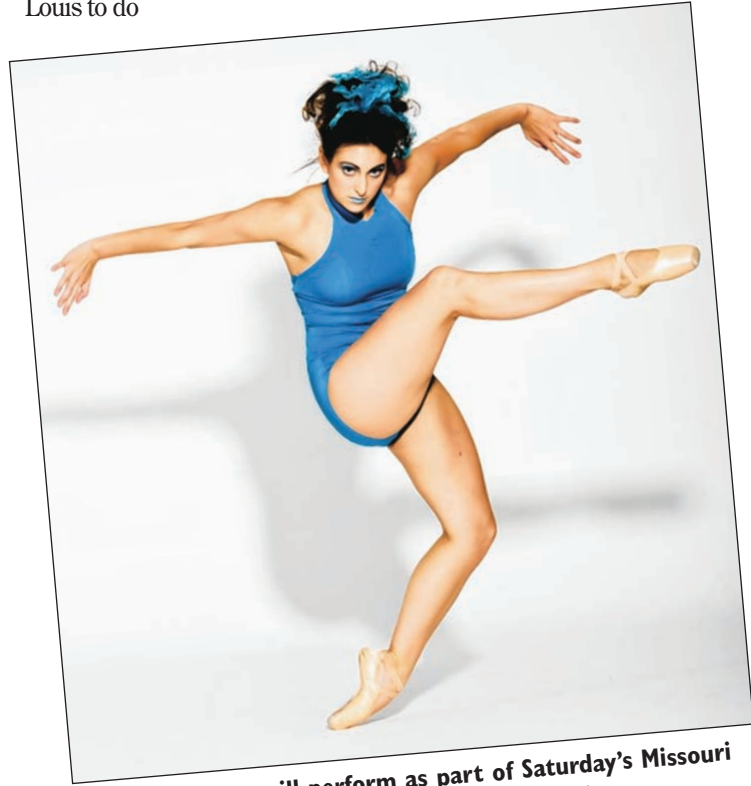
Charcoal: Emily Jurgensmeyer, Tipton, first; Kaylei Gooch, Cole Camp, second; Victoria Figueroa, Cole Camp, third; Natalya Oliferchuk, Green Ridge, fourth; Travis Brenenstahl, Stover, Jaron Spotten, Windsor, honorable mention.

Paint: Yelana Oliferchuk, Green Ridge, first; Jasmin Hartwig, Sacred Heart, second; Alyssa Johnson, La Monte, third; Kimmi Finkiewicz, Cole Camp, fourth.

Mixed media: Kristen Morton, Green Ridge, first; Stevie Greer, Lincoln, second; Diana Boyko, Smithton, third; Grace Stonner, Tipton, fourth; Tanya Ahrens, Stover, honorable mention.

Ink: Laurel Larimore, Green Ridge, first; Cole Baker, Cole Camp, second; Claudia Martinez, La Monte, third; Brie Herrick, Green Ridge, fourth; Ryan Watkinson, Stover, honorable mention.

Best of Show: Laurel Larimore, Green Ridge.



Elise Mosbacher will perform as part of Saturday's Missouri Contemporary Ballet show at the Liberty Center.