

Maya Robinson/Chronicle file photo The American Dance Festival will open its six-week season today. The festival, in its 32nd year of operations in Durham, will begin with performances directed by Shen Wei, who choreographed the opening ceremony of the Beijing Olympics.

After 32 years, ADF rolls on in Durham

By: Jessica Kim

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The American Dance Festival is kicking off its 32nd consecutive six-week dance festival in Durham today.

As reported by The New York Times in 1982, ADF was considered one of the nation's "most important art institutions" by Jonathan Olds, then-executive vice president of Liggett Inc. The festival brings together dancers, choreographers, students and community members in a mission to explore the cultural significance of modern dance. Through eight world-premiere shows, one U.S. debut and four reconstructions of classic work, the performances will explore the relationship between modern dance and ballet.

"Our theme is [to] explore 'Where Ballet and Modern Meet,'" said Jodee Nimerichter, co-director of ADF. "This year we really wanted to focus on the impact that each dance form, both ballet and modern, have had in their development of current artistic expression. We want to look at the boundaries that do or do not exist between the two different art forms."

This year, the programs will begin with Shen Wei Dance Arts from June 18 to 20. The entire piece of three parts will be performed together for the first time in the new Durham Performing Arts Center downtown. The Shen Wei Dance Arts has earned worldwide acclaim since its introduction at the 2000 ADF.

"My friends and I are excited to see the Shen Wei performance. I've heard that they do amazing dances. It'll definitely be a good show to watch," senior Nan Lin said.

Another highlight is the Emanuel Gat Dance, which will be performed from June 22 to 24 at Duke's Reynolds Theater. Originally from Israel, Gat will show a world premiere duet with music by R. Strauss, Riad al Sunbati and The Beatles.

"Every year we try to do as much traveling as possible to see work not only within the U.S. but also outside of the U.S," Nimerichter said. "I saw 30 to 40 different works in Israel. When I came back, we decided it would be exciting to do a highlight of what is happening there with Israeli choreographers."

American Dance Festival was founded at Connecticut College in New London, Conn. in 1948. Almost 30 years later, the program relocated to Duke University.

New York dance choreographer Mark Dendy, a North Carolina native and a past ADF student, will be performing two site-specific works from June 18 to 20.

To make the performances more accessible to the community in a poor economy, the organization has a "Dance on a Dime" discount program with specific deals for community members, groups, students, seniors and college employees.

"We continue to try to embrace the community with ticket prices by keeping the performances affordable so people of all economic background can attend," Nimerichter said.

In addition to performances held at DPAC downtown and the Reynolds Theater on campus, the American Dance Festival sponsors a six-week school for students between ages 16 and 18, and a four-week school for young dancers between ages 12 and 16.

The ADF provides community service programs such as a year-round program for young performers, a free seminar and panel discussion series featuring choreographers and guided tours of classes and workshops.

Performances will continue in Durham until July 25, concluding with performances by Hollins University, a highly selective dance program with students from around the world.

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