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Exploration

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Dance is a form of theater. But many works for the stage are called neither dance nor theater but "dance theater."

The term "dance theater" has its roots in *Tanztheater*, a form of expressionist dance that developed in the German-speaking world during the 1920s. But does anyone know what it means now? Where does pure dance end, and where does the dance-theater genre begin? With lots of spoken text and a clear narrative that might befit a play? With multimedia effects that are so prominent that they come to equal human movements in importance? Would singing transform a dance piece into a dance-theater one?

The American Dance Festival, which runs Thursday through July 24 in Durham, isn't setting out to provide a definitive answer. But several different and intriguing answers could emerge on the stages of the Durham Performing Arts Center and Reynolds

Industries Theater at Duke University. There will also be opportunities to discuss the issue further in seminars and post-performance talks.

"We're really leaving it as a question mark -- and then, hopefully, sharing as much work as possible that we think will help shed light on what ... dance theater is," said Jodee Nimerichter, the festival's co-director.

Much of that work will be new, reflecting an established festival tradition of commissioning and staging new works by leading choreographers. Eight world premieres and a United States premiere are planned.

Many of the choreographers represented at this year's festival have created works "known for dipping a toe in both theater and dance and then back again, all with great success," press materials say. They include the late Jerome Robbins, Shen Wei, Paul Taylor, RUBBERBANDance Group, Martha Clarke, Pilobolus, Mark Dendy, Tatiana Baganova and Rosie Herrera.

Clarke's work will be presented July 5-7 in Reynolds Industries Theater. It is based on the life of Ann Lee, the founder of the Shakers, a now-defunct religious sect in New England known for the chastity of its members. Press materials describe the weaving together of movement, song and dance to "present the contradiction between the prim prudery of Shaker tenets and the wild, sexual nature they suppressed."

Nimerichter said that Dendy, a festival veteran, has come up with a "prequel" to *Dream Analysis*, a

piece from the 1990s. Like *Dream Analysis*, the prequel will bring lots of important dance figures to life and look at a young boy's life moving through dance. It will be staged June 21-23 in Reynolds Industries Theater.

Nimerichter raved about *Oyster*, a 1999 piece that Inbal Pinto & Avshalom Pollak Dance Company of Israel will present when it makes its ADF debut June 17-19 at the Durham Performing Arts Center. Based on a short story by filmmaker Tim Burton, the work explores "the best of where fantasy and sideshow spectacle meet."

Patrons can expect everything from human marionettes to double-headed men and armless oddities in a work that blurs the lines between ballet, acrobatics, mime and theater.

The (London) Times called *Oyster* "a magical gift to the audience." Nimerichter called it "a feast for the eyes that they're bringing to the stage."

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