

## Festival dances around Duke University

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By Jane Vranish

DURHAM, N.C. -- Divided into a Gothic-style West Campus and a Georgian-style East Campus, Duke University has a marked Southern charm.

The growing metropolitan area known as the Triangle includes Chapel Hill, where the University of North Carolina is located, Raleigh and Durham, and has a combined population of nearly 700,000. Home to the minor-league Durham Bulls of "Bull Durham" movie fame, it also boasts the American Dance Festival, which is definitely major league.

ADF, which takes over Duke's East Campus every summer, has a dual focus on both performance and education, symbolized by awards such as the \$50,000 Samuel H. Scripps ADF Award for Lifetime Achievement (Martha Clarke this year) and the Balasaraswati/Joy Ann Dewey Beinecke Endowed Chair for Distinguished Teaching Award (Yang Meiqi, China's "mother of modern dance"). But its real function is to contribute to the progress of dance, both creatively and intellectually.

Over its 70-year history, ADF's impact on the fledgling art form has been immeasurable. Started at Bennington College in Vermont, it moved to Connecticut College in New London, Conn., New York University and finally to its current home at Duke. Thousands of students have passed through its studios, including Merce Cunningham, Paul Taylor and, yes, Madonna.

At a glance, its six-week summer program quickly demonstrates its intellectual diversity, delving into "Dancing for the Camera," an international festival of film and video dance and technology, and constructing an online video blog in "May we have this Cyber Dance?"

ADF also packs plenty of activities for the students. Classes in ballet, modern, hip-hop, African and other forms of dance are spread over four main areas. Most notable is the large, white wooden structure called The Ark, which seems to maintain its relative cool on exceptionally hot and humid days despite a lack of air conditioning.

Last week, resident choreographer Natalia Podkovyra was holding an audition in Brody Recreation Center, and Catherine Miller, a member of Mark Dendy Dance Company, gave a delectable sneak peek at some of her own works-in-progress at The Ark.

The family feeling is undeniable. ADF provides an opportunity to network with established artists and build lifelong connections among fellow students. The Dendy company is a perfect example. All of the dancers, including Mr. Dendy himself, attended ADF and were there to give back.

Mr. Dendy did it in an unusual way, offering a premiere that actually traced the development of one of his dancers, Alex Speedie, in "Divine Normal." The new work still hadn't found its identity, filled as it was with inspirational references to Martha Graham and Vaslav Nijinsky, family, friendship, carving a career in New York and sexual awakening. Even though "Divine Normal" cast its net over a wide area, the small cast of five was nearly always adept at playing the varying characters and executing quick costume changes. The strength of the work was not the story -- at times there was just too much information -- but the duets. Although a "Swan Lake" take-off was weak, the rest, including Mr. Speedie and his friend, Peggy, and the final reference to Nijinsky's "Afternoon of a Faun" were masterful.

ADF also introduces new companies, such as Montreal's RUBBERBANDance Group, a spiffy combination of hip-hop and modern dance. Choreographer Victor Quijada brought "Loan Sharking," a compilation of sections from the company's strongest works. Cast in the image of Ohad Naharin's "Deca Dance" and "Minus One," which was actually set on Les Grands Ballets Canadiens de Montreal, the RUBBERBANDance's version was surprisingly effective.

Although hip-hop is still in the midst of establishing itself as a serious concert art form, this Canadian company (although Mr. Quijada comes from Los Angeles) has to be considered a major influence in the development of dance's newest branch. The clothing was casual, the atmosphere mesmerizing, the choreography wonderfully musical. And when did I ever think that I would be watching hip-hop to music by Stravinsky ("Firebird," no less), Vivaldi and Brubeck? That takes a leap of faith of another kind.

It also had a kinship with rock 'n' roll in the nifty lighting design by Yan Lee Chan, featuring a sensual relationship between

light and dark and a great blinking spot that captured the dancers in various parts of the stage (an earthy variation on David Parsons' leaping "Caught").

Mr. Quijada's style has a structure that the audience can latch onto, along with an almost poetic style of movement. And I loved the fact that both men and women are virtually on equal footing, which is a rarity in hip-hop.

Best of all, it was a look at the future of dance, which continues to blend in new and surprising ways, and chronicled so brilliantly at the ADF.

For more information on the American Dance Festival, go to [www.americandancefestival.org](http://www.americandancefestival.org).

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