

Campus Precedents

Universities show signs of doing new math with ticket buyers from physics departments and religion classes.

BY JENNA RUSSELL

THE DANCE PERFORMANCE, staged at Dartmouth College on a bright afternoon last September, took place a short walk from the Hopkins Center for the Arts. But it was far from a traditional campus arts performance.

The artists, members of the "extreme dance" troupe Project Bandaloop, performed while rappelling down the walls of the glass lobby in the college science center. The audience consisted largely of physics students. And the show was accompanied by a lecture, given by a physics professor, on the roles played by momentum and gravity in the performance.

Welcome to the future of campus arts presenting.

Eighteen months after the 104th American Assembly examined the role of the performing arts in higher education, some leading campus arts presenters say they are engaged with academic life on campus as never before. Lead-

ers of campus arts centers said their approach is evolving, and as they draw closer to faculty and curriculum, their work is increasingly seen as vital to the university mission.

The changes that are making campus arts more essential also bring new ways to tap student audiences.

"I think the whole field has changed," said Margaret Lawrence, programming director for Dartmouth's Hopkins Center. "It used to be many artists came and left, but now nearly every artist does some kind of residency. ... Colleges and universities realize the value of arts presenters as a resource on campus."

The clearest change in the relationship between artists and their audiences on campus is the one Lawrence described: Performers who once breezed into town for one night only are staying longer—a week or two or three—to teach master classes and host open rehearsals, giving stu-



Project Bandaloop's dance demonstration at Dartmouth

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dents unprecedented access to the creative process.

At the Wexner Center for the Arts at Ohio State University, artists' availability for residencies is the first consideration in planning the season, performing arts director Charles Helm said. Performances by those artists are scheduled later. Residencies are also essential at the University of Maryland's four-year-old Clarice Smith Performing Arts Center.

"We're much more interested in the process than the performance itself," said Brian Jose, the center's director of marketing. "We won't have [artists] here if they can't stay longer to work with students. It's absolutely imperative."

The students benefiting from the trend, and forging relationships with their performing arts centers as a result, are not just dance and theater majors. At the University of California at Berkeley, Laurie Anderson's *Songs and Stories from Moby Dick* attracted English majors. A Balinese orchestra's appearance at Lafayette College in Pennsylvania became fodder for a course in Asian religion.

At Dartmouth, the Hopkins Center also brought *Alladeen* to campus last year. The theatrical collaboration between New York experimental company The Builders Association and London collective motiroti takes place in an international call center in India. The timely subject matter caught the attention of Dartmouth's Tuck School of Business, which planned a daylong event around the performance, complete with a panel of CEOs debating the pros and cons of outsourcing.

"Now they want to know what we're going to do next," said the Hopkins Center's Lawrence, who attributes some

of her success in crossing disciplines to the small size of her campus. Dartmouth has 5,500 students, an intimacy that has helped her build relationships with diverse departments.

In at least one case, rich opportunities provided by an arts center have directly and permanently shaped curriculum. Three years ago, motivated by access to working artists at the Wexner Center, theater department chairwoman Lesley Ferris boldly revamped Ohio State's MFA program in acting to focus on the creation of new work. Students now take classes in directing, playwriting and video production in addition to traditional coursework in voice, acting and movement.

"I believe we are the curricular component to the Wexner Center, and I felt we needed to take more advantage of that great strength," Ferris said.

For non-arts majors, seeing performers offstage and up close may shed light on what drives their work. But the wealth of residencies has not sparked a dramatic increase in the rate of student attendance at campus performances, which presenters describe as persistently lower than they would like.

Students are central to the mission of campus presenters, but remain a minority at most performances. At Dartmouth, where student tickets are \$5, the student audience has grown from 19 to 30 percent of total attendance in a decade, said Lawrence. A third of the tickets at the Maryland center are purchased by students, who pay \$7 per performance. Ohio State students make up about 22 percent of the audience at the Wexner Center.

Jose, the Smith center spokesman, said Maryland pre-

The Builders Association and motiroti's *Alladeen*



senters are not satisfied with the state of student attendance. In an aggressive attempt to connect with new students before their routines are established, the Smith Center hosts freshmen from the campus honors program in its concert hall during their first week on campus. The center's staff also works with upper-class resident assistants who supervise freshman halls, educating them about arts offerings so they can send new students to events.

"Studies show that students come in with a great desire to attend arts events, and then that desire falls off a cliff sophomore and junior year," said Jose. "It's so important to make an impression at the beginning."

Presenters try to plan events that will appeal to students, but students are not involved directly in programming, he said.

Matt O'Rourke arrived at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst two years ago with a head start in the arts. A longtime drummer with a deep interest in percussion, he had attended a show at the UMass Fine Arts Center before he ever applied to the university. A professor he admired had written the music for the performance.

Many of his classmates visited the arts center their first week on campus, he said, when an appearance by *Saturday Night Live* cast member Darrell Hammond brought in a large student audience. Comedians continue to pack the auditorium, said O'Rourke, a journalism major from Connecticut, but other arts offerings, especially those from other countries, seem to generate less interest.

"I think it has a lot to do with the way you were raised," said the 20-year-old, who is arts editor for the campus paper this year. "If your parents are saying, 'Let's go to a play,' then you're going to do that, but if your family was watching ESPN all day. ... Some people go to college, do the work, and stay in the dorm, and other people are always out doing what's out there."

O'Rourke, who said he was exposed to the arts by his family and in public schools, plans to see *Cats* when it comes to UMass this fall. He'll skip two other shows, *42nd Street* and *Miss Saigon*, only because he's already seen them both.

Most students arrive at college with little past exposure to performing arts, said campus presenters, who pointed to the loss of arts curriculum in public schools.

"The hardest challenge is classical music, because students aren't coming to college with the background," said Ellis Finer, director of the Williams Center for the Arts at Lafayette College in Pennsylvania. "We find footholds where we can."

At the Wexner Center, where only contemporary work is presented, one successful foothold for students has been the packed schedule of cutting-edge music acts. Electronica, art rock and indie hip-hop shows, presented an average of twice a month, are a "gateway to the arts," said Helm, who applies the same rigorous standards of artistic excellence to up-and-coming bands that he applies to other artists he selects.

Recent shows have featured New York art-rock quartet Gang Gang Dance and the psychedelic ensemble Comets on Fire, from San Francisco.

"To see these bands here in Columbus is very big to [students], and it creates a buzz around the Wexner Center," Helm said. "Once they graduate, a lot of them stay here, and if we've captured them as students, then they stay engaged."

The sense of momentum among college arts presenters stems from the success of specific ventures and from a growing belief that their work is considered central to the campus mission. National meetings, including last year's American Assembly, have drawn university administrators into an ongoing dialogue with campus presenters, and some feel there is movement toward a fundamentally closer relationship.

A related movement in the field, led by Helm and others, aims to show outsiders how the "creative lab work" of artists in residence fulfills the campus research mission. More universities are embracing that notion, Helm said; the greatest potential benefit for presenters would be increased investment in the budget for residencies, which can be expensive.

Recognition is also growing around the ways campus performing arts centers can help institutions recruit top students, high-profile professors and even benefactors. "These are the places where alumni, and potential donors, come to campus," said Jerry Yoshitomi, a California-based consultant who serves as moderator for a three-year-old ad hoc group of university presenters.

Perhaps most encouraging of all is evidence that some college leaders are recognizing the imbalance of attention paid to the arts and sciences. The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill recently renovated a theater on campus and is hiring a presenter, Yoshitomi said, and Stanford University, kicking off an ambitious capital fund drive, named the arts one of four target areas that will benefit from the campaign.

"There's very strong understanding among the senior leadership of the value of these programs, and that's why things are getting built," he said. "The fact of the imbalance is understood, and some people are beginning to think about rectifying it."

Dartmouth provost Barry Scherr has valued the role of the arts on campus for years. But when he attended the American Assembly meeting last year, and talked with college leaders and presenters from around the country about dwindling federal funding and disappearing school programs, his appreciation for the Hopkins Center took on an added dimension.

"What pulled me in was the role they play on campus, but what became very clear was that campuses are the main supporters of the arts in the U.S. right now," he said. "When you sit and talk with people, you see how important that is."

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