

ENGAGING
the spirit of collaboration to place the study of
the performing arts in a class by itself



For **Love**
of the **Stage**

***Endless Romance with
Performance Inspires
a New Division***

On an autumn afternoon in Halsey Hall, north of the Pentacrest, ballet students practice before the barre, looks of intense concentration on their faces as they gracefully perform a complex series of movements. Across the Iowa River in the Voxman Music Building, meanwhile, a solitary student practices his clarinet for an upcoming recital, repeating a difficult passage over and over to get just the right phrasing. And downriver at the Theatre Building, a group of drama students heatedly discuss differing interpretations of an upcoming play.

On a tour through the buildings that house the College of Liberal Arts and Science's Division of Performing Arts, one can't help but feel the passion that permeates the study of music, dance, and theatre at Iowa. Thanks to the establishment of the new Division of Performing Arts, college faculty and administrators hope to further strengthen these nationally respected programs of study.



Students learn from faculty who are performers.



Theatre arts students learn by creating and performing new works.

Launched in August 2000, the new division builds on the spirit of collaboration that has long existed among the three departments. While the academic programs continue to be run independently, their performance schedules and administrative functions now are jointly operated.

“Our goal is to further cross-fertilization between departments, so that actors can more easily be involved in music, musicians can participate in dance performances, and so on,” says David Nelson, former director of the School of Music and current chair of the division.

Founded in 1906, the School of Music was a pioneer in granting graduate degrees for creative work in the arts and today is ranked among the top five state university music schools in the nation. The quality of both faculty and students is showcased in nearly 500 performances each year, with an equal number of student and faculty performances and recitals. Among the school’s top performing groups are the University Symphony Orchestra, Chamber Orchestra, Philharmonia, and Symphony Band. Resident ensembles include the Maia Quartet, the Iowa Brass Quintet, and the Iowa Woodwind Quintet.

The Center for New Music is gaining special recognition both on campus and beyond. Founded in 1966, it was the first academic center of its kind west of the Mississippi and has grown to become one of the world’s great sanctuaries for contemporary composition and performance. Two years ago, its Russian Contemporary Music Festival featured 10 guest composers from the Moscow Conservatory of Music and garnered rave reviews from *The New York Times*.

Although one of the nation’s oldest theatre programs, Iowa’s theatre arts department is especially known for its emphasis on the creation and performance of new works.

“Our mission to support original plays is in many ways a natural complement to the University’s long-standing brilliance in creative

writing,” says Alan MacVey, chair of theatre arts. “Our graduate playwriting program is probably the best in the country, and our New Play Festival features five to six original works performed in a single week each May. We also run a summer repertory season focused on the work of a single writer. Respect for writers defines our program.”

Youngest of the three performing arts departments, dance is rapidly rising in prominence.

“Our undergrad enrollments have doubled within the past 10 years,” says David Berkey, chair of the dance department. “We now have about 100 undergraduate majors, along with another 500

students who take courses in our department. That’s very large for a university dance program. The average number of undergraduate dance majors for departments nationally is 50 students.”

A greater emphasis on global dance has broadened the department’s offerings in recent years, a reflection of the important role dance plays in cultures around the world. And in an example of the cross-fertilizations that the new division hopes to encourage, last year Brazilian-born faculty member Armando Duarte collaborated with School of Music flutist Tadeu Coelho, also a Brazilian, to create a faculty concert called “;Rompe! The Dance and Music of the Americas Project.”

“It’s always valuable—and fun—to work with artists and professors from other departments,” Duarte says. “I think students gain a lot of benefit from these collaborations as well.”

Like music and theatre, the dance department also emphasizes the production of new works. The department’s premier event for showcasing them is Dance Gala, which celebrated its 20th anniversary last fall. Held each November on the Hancher stage, the gala features the choreographic talent of the dance faculty in an eclectic mix of works performed by more than 50 dancers.

“Because of all the care and energy that’s put into the event, the dancers always come through,” Berkey says. “I’ve never seen a lackluster performance at a Dance Gala.”

Though diverse in many ways, faculty members from the Division of Performing Arts share a common commitment to teaching.

“We are looking for world-class artists who are sensitive to the teaching and learning process,” Nelson says. “It doesn’t do any good to bring in people who can’t teach. It’s absolutely essential for performance faculty to be performers themselves. I don’t think it’s possible to give students a complete view of what it means to be a performer unless you’re doing it yourself.”

