

Engineering and Ballet Equal Balance for UNH Senior

Left brain meets right for Brian Gray '13

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Brian Gray spent months working on his senior capstone project, helping design a rocket whose technology would, in the event of a disaster, produce a temporary Internet network.

He then traveled to Toney, Alabama, in April for a “proof of concept” launch as part of the NASA Student Launch Project. And it worked: the rocket rose up almost a mile and the data transmission went as planned. Pretty cool stuff for a mechanical engineering major.

But equally cool is this: in March, at the same time Gray was using all that left brain thinking, he was rehearsing with UNH’s ballet dance troupe for a performance of “Echoes From the Highland,” practicing so many hours a day that it made taking over a key role easy after a lead dancer was injured opening night.

“I like using the other side of my brain instead of just punching numbers all the time,” Gray says. “It’s fun to do something so completely different.”

Engineering (he already has a job with a company that designs medical devices) allows him to do hands-on work –to figure things out as he goes along. He likes that.

Dancing, however, is a whole other kind of challenge.

“There’s quite a learning curve. It’s not just throwing on pointe shoes and tutus,” says Gray, a senior who first started dancing as a freshman when a friend invited him to a “bring a boy day” ballet class.

That’s where he met Larry Robertson, UNH professor of dance and the ballet company instructor who has guided Gray through his performances with the dance company during the last two years.

Gray has been back to the “bring a boy day” classes many times since. He has also taken tango lessons. In “Echoes From the Highland” he got to dance while wielding a sword. There were fight scenes. He even had a duel with Robertson.

“There was a lot of work involved; rehearsals and the shows. But it was a nice outlet. A nice change from sitting in classes talking about systems and fluid dynamics,” Gray says. “With dance, there is emotion. That’s different than just a solution.”

Gray says he has always liked the artistic side of things, and that he would love to find other dancing opportunities. Already he is planning on dancing with the UNH troupe after he graduates.

“It’s been an awesome opportunity to be part of the dance company,” Gray says. “How many times in your life are you going to be able to jump on stage and do something like that? It was unique.”

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