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At UNH, The Dancers Fly

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DURHAM, N.H. -- At the University of New Hampshire, students twist and flip in the air, taking advantage of the university’s nationally recognized aerial dance program and a style of dance that has been popularized around the world by Cirque du Soleil.

UNH’s Theatre and Dance Department is known as the premier public university where students can learn aerial dance. While universities and colleges around the nation offer bachelor’s degrees in dance or dance performance, UNH has been thoroughly incorporating aerial dance into its curriculum for five years.

This spring, students will display their talents at the Aerial Dance Showcase, Wednesday, May 2, 2007, in the Newman Dance Studio, New Hampshire Hall. Shows are at 6 and 7:30 p.m. Tickets are $3.50. The showcase benefits scholarships for theatre and dance students. For ticket information, call (603) 862-2919.

The UNH Aerial Dance program was introduced in 2002 by Gay Nardone, associate professor of dance. Founded in the 1970s by Terry Sendraff, aerial dance has skyrocketed in popularity with Americans because of the success of Cirque du Soleil. The first Cirque show was launched in 1984; today 8 million people see Cirque each year.

“My idea to add aerial dance began as an interest in knowing how to work aerial apparatuses for a dance concert incorporating circus skills. I met and worked with circus performers and aerialists. At that time I began studies with two aerialists who have been at the root of my training,” Nardone says.

Nardone trained (and continues to train) with Elsie Smith and Serenity Smith Forchion, former duo-trapeze aerialists in Cirque du Soleil’s “Saltimbanco.” In 2003, the sisters founded the Nimble Arts Trapeze and Circus School in Brattleboro, VT. Because of Nardone’s personal connection with them, UNH students also have the chance to train with the artists.

Today, UNH’s aerial dance program incorporates a number of apparatuses: single, double and triple trapezes; fabric; lyra (aerial hoop); rope; straps; sling; the Spanish web; and the hammock.

Several UNH aerialists have landed positions with professional dance companies because they could fly. Most recently two of our dance and aerial students were hired for the National Equity touring company of “Pippin” with aerial dance added to the production.

“I always have needed a different kind of floor so that I could get a different kind of sound for my tap dance. I moved out to the apron and from there I started to wonder where else I could go, and the answer was up. What UNH does here is now changing with the professional dance world. Broadway would be a good example; there were five shows in the last season that included aerial arts,” Nardone says.
MULTIMEDIA AVAILABLE
Video Clip
http://www.unh.edu/news/UNHaerialdance.mov (16.6MB) This file is available in a number of formats to meet your needs, including as a Podcast.

B-Roll
Footage includes interviews with Nardone, aerial dance students and footage of aerial dance performances.

High-Resolution Photos
Photos of a recent aerial dance performance:
http://www.unh.edu/news/UNHaerialdance1.jpg
http://www.unh.edu/news/UNHaerialdance2.jpg