

The Oregonian

Friday, January 24, 2003

Conduit relaunches as nonprofit with an artistic bash

By Catherine Thomas
Special to The Oregonian

Its digs are small but its reach is wide. Conduit Dance, the intimate performance studio in downtown's sunlit Pythian Building, has changed the face of modern dance in Portland. Now it's officially launching as a nonprofit, better equipped and better funded to give local dance artists the support to show their work. What better reason for a party?

Begun in 1995 as a coalition of six choreographers, Conduit quickly became a vital regional epicenter for contemporary dance, offering year-round technique classes, performance and rehearsal space, and workshops with renowned visiting artists to dancers. The impact is highly visible: The recent surge of new dance companies in Portland reads like a Who's Who of Conduit alumni.

But while the studio was busy incubating the next generation of contemporary

choreographers, it wrestled with mounting operating costs. Faced with the dissolution of Conduit's group of core artists, choreographers Teresa Mathern and Mary Oslund took the helm as executive directors, shepherding its latest incarnation as a nonprofit organization capable of supporting a much larger artist base.

Conduit is back from the brink, and Mathern and Oslund are throwing a benefit bash to celebrate, transforming the studio into a casual cabaret with libations, wandering minstrels and performances by local dance luminaries.

"The benefit is very festive, really about the celebration of our nonprofit and the progress we've made very recently," Oslund said. "We're part of a continuing fold in the dance history of the city, organizations based in grassroots. We're trying to create an organization that has

longevity beyond individuals. It's a great leap forward for us, built on the legacy that already exists."

Local diva Lyndee Mah will be mistress of ceremonies for the revelry, which includes cellist Hamilton Cheifetz and the adventurous experimentalist Matt Wayne Band.

Mathern and Oslund will perform excerpts from new and recent works, an excellent chance to see two distinctive artists on the same performance bill. Also on the program are master choreographer/dancer Gregg Bielemeier and choreographer Josie Moseley's solo for dancer Jae Diego.

"We have a brilliant surprise guest, a very exciting person who is a stupendous cabaret performer and has many other talents," Oslund says. "It will be a fabulous act. People will be thrilled."

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