

Diversity in Translation

Traduza makes its company debut at Lord Leebrick

A silky bossa nova melody emanates from the stereo as Valéria Ball, artistic director of Traduza, prepares for rehearsal. Her hips rock back and forth, charmed by the beat. She's thinking. Then, all at once, inspiration comes and her body lunges forward. The walls of the studio barely contain the exaggerated samba that ensues, translating the rich tapestry of her Brazilian heritage into movement.

Ball's choreography, which ranges in theme from the harsh struggle for survival amongst Brazilian street kids to the nation's nearly comic enthusiasm for fútbol, bears little resemblance to any established dance technique. There's no Martha Graham in her posture; little of Lester Horton in her free-formed movement. In fact, Ball's experience with modern dance began long before she ever visited New York and began to study their artistic legacies. Her work is vibrant, original and literal — translating the memories and challenges of her life as a Brazilian-American to the stage.

"I think it's just like for any choreographer, but instead of picking a theme that goes on here in America I always look back and see what happened to my life," Ball said. "You know, 20 years ago what sort of things were important to me? It's almost like a flashback."

After teaching dance in the U.S. for more than 10 years, Ball began to feel stifled artistically. In 2002, she founded the Umpqua Modern Dance Project, a non-profit devoted to raising awareness and appreciation of contemporary dance in rural southern Oregon. "My dance students weren't on the level that I wanted them to be for me to challenge myself," Ball said. "I like to perform, I like to create, and I wanted to express myself that way."

Last winter, Ball expanded her company to the Eugene area, taking on seven new dancers and the ambitious production of *Translations*: a four-day company debut at Lord Leebrick Theatre. The show combines the passion and energy of "Brazileirissimo" with the harsh and isolating realities of the immigrant experience. Ashland choreographer Robin Stiehm and local choreographer Margo Van Ummersen will also showcase two new works in the performance.

In Van Ummersen's piece, "Tracking," the dim consciousness of a nearby presence haunts each dancer. Without touching, they trace each other's outlines; slowly at first, but then with heightened trust and curiosity. A series of languid duets follow, as the dancers explore the invisible force of human contact. "I wanted to experiment with feeling the impulse of another presence, another spirit, another charge near you all the time," Van Ummersen said.

Stiehm offers an abstract depiction of



Traduza

8 pm, Th.-Sat., June 15-17
4 pm, Sunday, June 18
Lord Leebrick Theatre,
\$15 adu./\$10 kids, stu.
& expatriates

the human propensity toward elitism and exclusivity in her new work, "Feist." The ominous clanging of wild bells accompanies a vigorous joust for social status as, one after the other, each dancer is cast out of the group. Alone and isolated, they seek re-entry only to be betrayed again.

Another draw to the show will be the original composition and live accompaniment of John Polese, who will perform with musicians Edson Oliveira, Kimberly Cullen and Kevin Ryan. "Each of us is influenced by our own experiences with Brazilian music and culture," Polese said. Oliveira is from Brazil. Cullen and Ryan have each lived in Brazil for an extended period of time. Polese has studied and performed Brazilian music with a local band for several years.

As a result, their music reverberates with creative percussion inspired by the diverse spectrum of Brazil's musical heritage. In Ball's signature piece, "Boundaries," Polese masterfully weaves his own vocals and a gentle accordion over a slow, pulsating drum.

Ball precludes the piece with video footage of personal interviews with expatriates from around the world. As the lights come up, wooden stools litter the stage like landmines through which her dancers must forge their own paths into new and unfamiliar territory.

"I'm not Brazilian," said dancer Katie Bowers. "None of us are. But all of us can relate to feeling different, feeling isolated and unsure of our surroundings, and trying to find similarities. As a performer, you can kind of tap into that."

Ball's eyes dance when she talks about the upcoming performance, and the thrill of bringing her personal narrative to the stage for a full-length performance. "My show this year is about cultural exchange, because I feel like this is what I am about," she said with her hands over her heart. "Just being so proud of who I am and what my heritage is, and I want to dance about it."

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