

Teaming up to dance

By MARIANNE STOCHMAL
Staff Reporter

When the lights go down in the Educational Center for the Arts tonight, all the time and effort of a lengthy collaboration with New Haven composers will be on the line.

Again.
Opening night for the dance performance was Thursday night, so initial jitters have subsided. Yet the dancers still feel the pressure of making it happen for weekend audiences.

But members of the Barbara Feldman & Dancers Dance Company are excited and relieved finally to be bringing the show to life.

The New Haven-based modern dance company, established in 1981, will present new and repertory works during its winter series, through March 2.

This weekend's performances, at 8 p.m. tonight and Saturday and 3 p.m. Sunday,

comprise four segments, and feature new music by Dwight Andrews, Kalpana-Devi Schreiber and James Tony Finlayson.

The show was originally scheduled for last spring, but it was postponed for lack of funds. Fund-raising has been a problem, because the company relies heavily on grants and individual contributions to do new work.

Artistic director and choreographer Barbara Feldman said it was a matter of not wanting to "sacrifice the quality of what we're doing, and feeling ready." Feldman, who also dances with the company, said she thinks the wait was worth it.

Two of the dancers, Feldman and Margi Caplan, are New Haven natives. Various reasons brought the rest of the company, including Tom Haskell, Amy Kennedy-Wooten, Suzanne Serviss, and Fran Smyer-Dubrow, to New Haven from as far as North Carolina and South Dakota. All have dual careers, but they all wanted to dance.

Collaboration is what makes this company special, according to Feldman.

Feldman founded the company in an effort to bring together talented, modern dancers and musicians working in New Haven. From the start, she has emphasized collaboration with dancers and musicians as an essential part of her choreography.

This year, Feldman said, a major joint effort is a music and dance collaboration with Andrews, a composer and noted jazz artist.

Andrews and Feldman had talked

"Your hometown is your most critical audience."
— Feldman

about doing a piece together for about 10 years, Feldman said.

"We found this was a good time to pursue that," she said, and they are already planning another collaboration, even though this one is barely finished.

One piece, "Chant of Saints," is a piece for strings and percussion. The music for this has been in the works for more than a year, Feldman said.

The music has been commissioned and recorded, and the performance will feature that recording. In the future, Feldman said, she hopes to do the dance with live music, a big undertaking that is too expensive to do now.

For this production, the company received major support from several sources, including the New Haven Foundation and the Connecticut Commission on the Arts.

Collaborating, Feldman says, is "a more satisfying way to work. Everyone helps with various tasks... everyone lends his own expertise. There's no question these people are serious about their dance careers," Feldman said.

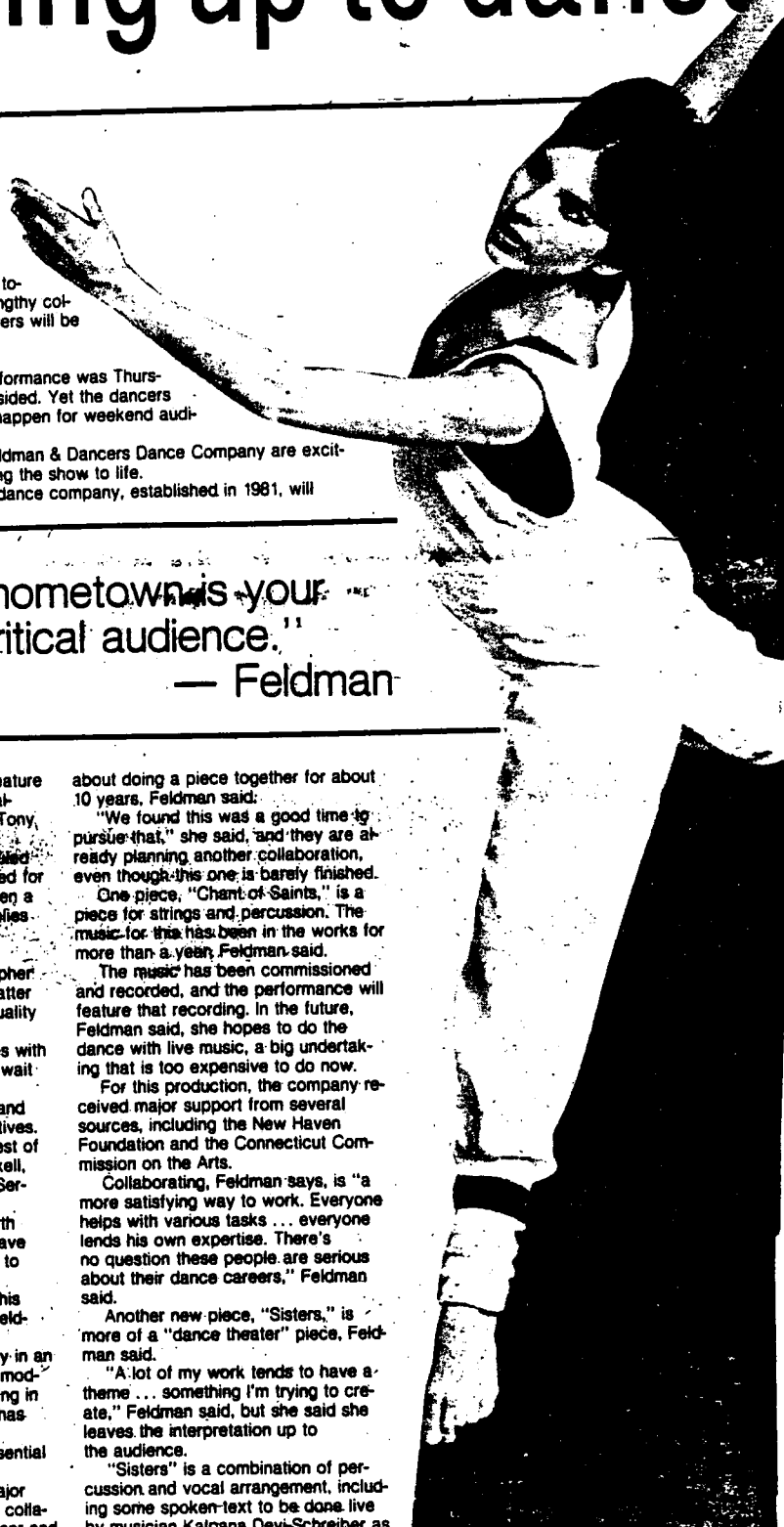
Another new piece, "Sisters," is more of a "dance theater" piece, Feldman said.

"A lot of my work tends to have a theme... something I'm trying to create," Feldman said, but she said she leaves the interpretation up to the audience.

"Sisters" is a combination of percussion and vocal arrangement, including some spoken-text to be done live by musician Kalpana Devi-Schreiber as the piece is performed.

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Feldman, artistic director and choreographer.





Dancers Haskell and Serviss cross paths during a performance.

Photo by JENNIFER W. LESTER



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It came about through the experiences of most of the dancers with their own sisters. They'd spent a lot of time talking about and sharing experiences, and the piece evolved from that, Feldman said.

Musician Jahmes Tony Finlayson coordinates the music for this segment as well as the others. Employing several unique-looking instruments, many of them African, Finlayson said he will "deal with texture" in the piece.

Finlayson said he is trying to bring out "certain feelings complimentary to what the dancers are

working on."

For New Haveners Feldman and Caplan, there is anxiety in performing in front of the "hometown crowd."

"Your hometown is your most critical audience," Feldman said.

Caplan agreed. "There's always an intense urge to please." But even more so on your own turf.

"You're trying to please on so many different levels," she said.

"You're showing a part of yourself through your art," Feldman said, and that in itself is risky.

"But that's what dancing's all about," she said.