

Out of the Ordinary

Local dancers join two New York choreographers in a celebration of community.

by Cheryl Pallant

Choreographers Sara Pearson and Patrik Widrig have a penchant for using an odd assortment of common items and gadgets as props in their dance theater works. For example, their work "Ordinary Festivals," showing this weekend, Nov. 17 and 18 at Grace Street Theater, features 300 oranges and two knives.

The crowd of fruit will not be their only company onstage, however. Pearson and Widrig will also be joined by four dancers from New York and 10 local dancers, many graduates of Virginia Commonwealth University's dance department from the past

15 years. "Ordinary Festivals" strings together a series of scenes of village life — folks gathering to work, play, talk, celebrate and mourn. Widrig is aware that the piece contains "an Italian feel from the prewar era," since the music accompanying the piece comes from that period. "It gives the feeling of a community from back then," he explains, "but we've had many comments that this could be anywhere."

The duo frequently develops a work from an ongoing interest in culture and ritual, often creating site-specific works. This piece, however, grew out of an earlier work. "Usu-

ally we start with a few simple ideas," Widrig explains, "and then they start growing. This one started with a previous project that was very difficult. The people we were working with were very difficult. We wanted to try a different tack, to work with people who work well together and could minimize problems, a group that can create a supportive community instead of a divisive one." They settled on a few movements and took their ideas into the studio to evolve with input from fellow dancers. The result is a nearly 50-minute work portraying a lively and compatible group of people.

A second work in the concert, "Splash," races along with great energy and swift spatial changes. Says Widrig, "There are splashes of energy, color and movement." Again, Pearson and Widrig have taken advantage of local talent, employing 14 VCU dance students in the piece.

Widrig offers practical reasons for offering parts to locals: "The code word these days to getting grants is 'outreach,' showing how the work expands the audience for dance," he says. But he has a preference, too, for working with members from the community, to learn about what motivates people. "Many foreign students live in New York [where he and Pearson live]. Our dance is not about getting dancers to perfect steps, but an opportunity to find out about people."

And he's finding out much about Richmond. Typically, he and Pearson rarely stay in one place for more than a week. This performance of "Ordinary Festivals" coincides with a seven-week residency at VCU. He finds their lengthy visit gratifying. "It's a luxury to dig in with people and see what a real job is like," he says, "... Richmond is like a village." **S**

Sara Pearson and Patrik Widrig's "Ordinary Festivals" will be performed Nov. 17 and 18 at Grace Street Theatre at 8 p.m. Tickets are \$15. Call 828-2020 for details.

Choreographers Sara Pearson and Patrik Widrig bring fruit, knives and an assortment of dancers to "Ordinary

DANCE

