

Discouraged once, concert dance group now outstanding school activity

by Shirley Buchanan

One of the lesser known but nevertheless one of the most successful activities of the University is the concert dance group of the physical education department. Performing each spring in its annual spring concert, the group offers to Omahans a highly—polished taste of modern dance, something that seldom comes to mid-western towns, even of Omaha's size.

First offered in 1931

The history back of these dance groups is probably unknown to most people, perhaps even the dancers themselves. It all began when Ruth Diamond, graduate of Nebraska University, a graduate student at Columbia University and Bennington College, came to the University in 1931. During her first year at the school, she was advised not to teach dance courses because of the previous lack of interest in such fields. In 1932, the Women's Athletic Association started a dance club as one of its activities and no credit was offered for it.

Due to an increase in enrollment the following year, the course was offered for the first time and received degree credit. As the girls advanced three classes were arranged, beginners, intermediate, and advanced. The climax of the girls' study resulted in the forming of a concert group in 1935.

First performances for "rif-raff"

The first public performances were merely demonstrations in the gymnasium at the old school. The department bought curtains to form a setting for their dances. The first audiences were mostly rif-raff from the vicinity. Several recitals were also presented at various times as the faculty became interested in the groups.

The first noted public performance was at the South Dakota Teachers Convention at Aberdeen. This was repeated at the Joslyn Memorial in January 1936 and became the first annual dance concert at that place. In the last few years the groups have danced to standing room audiences only.

Worldly themes are chosen

In the last three years the themes of the concerts have been selected as those most appropriate for the time. In 1940 the theme was War

and Peace showing conflict, war, propaganda, and peace. A trilogy, Leadership in Men was presented in 1941. The different kinds of leaders, dictators, passive, and democratic was portrayed. This spring the group presented a dance symbolizing three religions, Catholic, Hebrew and Protestant. Each year a comedy section is included but was not included this year because of the nature of this program.

Not only the women students of the University are interested in this type of dance but also the men students. This was evidenced when several years ago the members of Phi Sigma Phi fraternity wanted to present a take-off on modern dance for an aM-ie Day act. The boys were encouraged by Miss Diamond to do something more abstract and so they arranged for instruction in the girls' class for one semester. At the end of that time, aided by the girls, they had successfully completed a composition which when given for Ma-ie Day won them first place. Miss Diamond had hoped to have a group back this year but because of the drop in enrollment only one boy, Jack Hughes, returned to school.

Goes strength, coordination

The dance classes are taking part in the physical fitness program of the University through dance. It requires flexibility, strength and coordination, and in turn furnishes them with an opportunity for creative ability and a means of self-expression.

A variety of accompaniments have been used for the dances since their origin. Instruments of all types have been used. Well-known music is arranged for the dances as well as modern music. All music is made to fit the dances, often after the dance made up.

The University library contains the best and largest collection of books and articles on dance of any library in the country.

The dancers are usually asked to perform at the Christmas convocations with the choir. This year they were asked to give a concert at the Joslyn Memorial during the celebration of its tenth anniversary festival. This was considered a great honor both by the dancers and by the University. Pictures of the dancers and their activities have appeared in Life magazine twice and have also been shown in newspapers.