



students faculty/staff alumni parents

you@Ohio
Entrance Info &
Apply Online

Search

Google

Ohio.edu Sites
Name Directory

Find

academics research offices athletics the arts map & tour

OUTLOOK

Ohio University
News & Information

Friday, May 15, 2009

A history of coal mining, through dance Student showcases culture of Appalachian town

May 8, 2009

By Annmarie Steffes

Morgan Chambers, an Honors Tutorial College senior dance major, has been exploring cultures through movement. But for her senior thesis, she chose to interpret a culture much closer to her heart.

Her thesis project, "No. 6: Portraits of an Appalachian Town," is a series of dance pieces that portray life in a coal-mining town in the '30s, '40s and '50s.

A southern West Virginia native, Chambers was originally inspired to present her Appalachian heritage in her senior thesis when she choreographed a piece her junior year that centered on women carrying each other through their grief.

"What would be an instance when all these women would have lost the men in their lives? The first thought was war and the second thought was a coal mine collapse," she said.

Chambers' thesis features four pieces: the coal miners working the mines, the daily life of a coal miner's wife, the women's grief after a mine collapse and a church service. Each piece conveys on the paradox of the mine both being a source of sustenance and yet also a place of destruction.

In order to portray the spirit of these people, Chambers interviewed coal camp residents to understand their relationship with the coal mine. She then translated the emotions of the people into her choreography. She said her grandfather particularly contributed a lot to the impression of the mine itself.

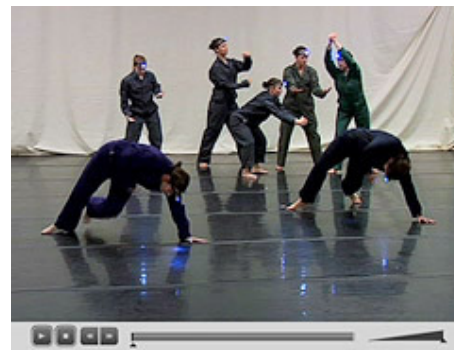
"My grandfather talked about how his father took him and his brother into the mines when they were little and what he perceived it as," she said. "I actually kind of translated that into a phrase of movement that's about 30 seconds long in the coal mine piece. It won't necessarily come off that way but I'm using it as a mini-narrative for myself, to give myself impulses to go off of when I'm choreographing."

The intimate and harsh memories of these people often made her extremely conscious of how her material should be presented, Chambers said.

"It kind of made me concerned about confronting these concepts in a thesis just because we are in an area where coal still is a big deal," she said. "The last survivor of the mine collapse just died this past winter. Everyone says they appreciate what I'm doing, but seeing how much of impact it had emotionally still made me concerned for bringing these things back up and how I was handling it."

Chambers said she does not wish to leave the audience with any impression of the Appalachia or coal mining towns. Instead, she simply wants to define the culture and the people for herself.

While her previous work has focused on sharing her point of view with other cultures, she had yet to express her own culture in her art. Her thesis has allowed her this opportunity and gave her the impetus to continue to do so in



[Click here](#) to watch a video clip of "No. 6: Portraits of an Appalachian Town."

Share this story

SHARE

Email To:

Email From:

Send

Top stories

May 15, 2009

Student innovation, creativity recognized [Research News]

Russ College honors alumni, faculty and staff [Engineering]

May 14, 2009

Global Runway: Modernity meets tradition

the future.

"I would like to continue to explore my personality in my art whether it is through my culture in thesis or whether it's through actually events I have been through," she said.

Related Links

Student Research and Creative Activity

Expo: <http://www.ohiou.edu/research/students>

Watch a clip of Chambers' performance:

<http://www.ohio.edu/outlook/08-09/May/589v.cfm>

Published: May 8, 2009 8:33 AM

Giving children a helping hand

May 13, 2009

Fine Arts Notebook: As the quarter winds down the arts heat up

OHIO faculty prepped for advancement

[Outlook archives](#)



Outlook welcomes your feedback, news items and story ideas

[Share comments about the site](#)

[Submit an announcement](#)

[Share a faculty, staff or departmental achievement](#)

Tel: 740-593-1890 Fax: 740-593-1887 E-mail: news@ohio.edu

Copyright © 2009 [Ohio University](#)

All Rights Reserved