

Ballet Nouveau will let viewers vote

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Revolutionary ideas beg for suitably bracing verbiage, but the best way to grasp them is often the simplest.

"We dance. You vote."

That's the essence of Ballet Nouveau Colorado's 21st Century Choreography Competition, a YouTube-driven, "American Idol"-style contest that has the potential to make modern dance relevant to vast new audiences.

"It's always a great challenge to not compromise your artistic integrity, but also strive to engage more people in it," said Garrett Ammon, Ballet Nouveau's artistic director. "This is an incredible opportunity to do that. We hope it helps encourage more people locally and nationally to experience art and life and get out to the theater more often."

Ballet Video Vote

- [Visit](#) Ballet Nouveau Colorado's website.
- [Visit](#) Ballet Nouveau's MySpace page.
- [Visit](#) the 21st Century Choreography Competition's website.
- [Watch](#) videos on the YouTube group page.

The essence of the competition is the way digital media deliver its entries. Broomfield-based Ballet Nouveau hopes to piggyback off the popularity of shows like "So You Think You Can Dance" and create an open, national forum for the best new choreography.

A panel of prestigious judges will view and rate all entries, but mostly the public watches and votes on its favorite five-minute pieces.

Submissions opened Sept. 1 and close Dec. 1, but voting continues through the end of the year. BNC will announce the winners thereafter, with performances in Northglenn and Lakewood during the first weeks of April. Three finalists will get \$1,500 each to stage pieces, and the first-place winner gets a cash prize and contract to create works for BNC.

The contest has attracted a handful of entries (see bncevolution.org) after three weeks, with more likely to follow as the word gets out. Like any good reality show, the public will be able to watch finalists navigate the rehearsal and performance process with online documentary featurettes.

In other words, it's about making dance appealing to the Web 2.0 generation. And BNC, which has grown to become the state's second-largest company behind Colorado Ballet, knows a thing or two about thinking on its feet.

It ended a fifth season with national media exposure and world-class choreographers in April, bidding farewell to artistic director Robert Mills. Husband-wife team Garrett Ammon and Dawn Fay joined in May from Ballet Memphis to continue the evolution.

Despite its limited budget, the company looks to continue the upward trend with a polished new season (kicking off Nov. 2 at Broomfield Auditorium) and the 21st Century Choreography Competition.

"We definitely think of this as a national program, because it's on YouTube and the entire population can log in," said Fay, BNC's associate artistic director. "You can vote and have some real input. Why not become as intrigued by dance as you are by Paris Hilton videos?"

Any fine arts company knows the key to survival is nimble promotion. Even Colorado Ballet, the state's largest, oldest, and best-funded company, boasts a Myspace profile. But BNC's profile has 10 times as many friends and appears first in a Google search. Earlier this week posters were mailed to nearly 500 ballet companies across the country promoting BNC's choreographer's competition. Judges like Wendy Perron (editor, Dance magazine), Virginia Johnson (editor, Pointe magazine), Trey McIntyre (artistic director and choreographer for the Trey McIntyre Project) and Gil Boggs (artistic director, Colorado Ballet) will surely raise eyebrows as well.

"We want to change the way the world feels about ballet and keep it alive in the 21st century," executive director Lissy Garrison told The Denver Post earlier this year.

Fay echoed her statement last week.

"I think this is going to allow people to realize that it's not some lofty art that a 21-year-old, or even a 60-year-old farmer, can't relate to," she said.

"This takes the philosophy of the company and gives it a megaphone," Ammon added. "That interaction is fundamental to what we believe dance is all about."

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