

Xclaim Dance

Company premiere inspired by Columbus bicentennial

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Painters put their thoughts and emotions on a canvas.

"Dance is a different type of art form in that the medium you use, the dancers are living," said Mariah Layne French, who founded Xclaim Dance in the fall of 2007. "They bring their own experiences and their perspective. It's exciting to see it come together."

Audiences will have the opportunity to observe how things come together at the fifth season premiere for Xclaim Dance, which has members from throughout central Ohio, Oct. 26-28 at the Columbus Dance Theater, 592 E. Main St.

Funded in part by a grant through the Greater Columbus Arts Council's Franklin County Neighborhood Arts program, "Soul of the City" will be performed at 8 p.m. Oct. 26 and 27, 4 p.m. Oct. 28. Tickets are \$15 for adults, \$10 for students and senior citizens.

A reception for the dancers in the company will follow the Oct. 26 performance, while a discussion on choreography is on tap after the conclusion of the show on Oct. 27, according to French.

"Soul of the City," as the name implies, is a kind of homage to Columbus in its bicentennial year. The program "celebrates the city of Columbus, the movements and mindsets that shaped generations," according to the troupe's website.

"I am really approaching this project in a way that is different than I've approached other projects," French said recently.

"We began this project thinking about the bicentennial, what's inspiring about Columbus and its history in a really broad sense," she added. "So we decided to cover the feeling of it in a more personal way, rather than to focus on the literal history."

A nine-year resident of the South Side and married to a Columbus native, French said she feels there is a "sense of adventure and resiliency and innovation" in the city.

She said she and her choreographing partners among the company decided to focus on these aspects "through the lens of personal experience, like visiting with your grandparents to talk about what life was like when they were young."

"I've really encouraged the dancers to find personal motivations for those things," French said. "We've talked about how a place is really the memories you form with the people you meet there. It's not the dirt you stand on."

The first act of "Soul of the City" features a review of dance from the flapper era through the dawn of hip hop in four short works, according to the troupe's website.

The second act warms to the bicentennial celebration with a "multimedia collage set to the sounds of soul music," the site states.

Choreography for the program is by Xclaim veterans Deena Schmidt of the Northwest area, Kelsey Schafer of Worthington, Laura Schoessler of Westerville, Crystal Irvin of Columbus and J. Shannon Filmore, formerly of the Northland area and now an East Side resident.
