UC SANTA BARBARA
THE Current

March 31, 2016
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Aspiring to Excellence

Call it one for the road.

As the lights begin to dim on his 26-year tenure at UC Santa Barbara, longtime dance professor and choreographer Jerry Pearson is staging a farewell show on the eve of his retirement. Gaucho dancers past and present will perform the four-piece concert meant to celebrate students as much as Pearson himself.

Featuring current dance majors, the UCSB Dance Company and professional company in-residence Santa Barbara Dance Theater (SBDT), “Aspire” is set for April 7–9, showing each night starting at 7:30 p.m., at Hatlen Theater. Besides choreographing the entire show, Pearson will also direct this grand finale performance.

“Doing a full concert at the end of my time here is a real treat, and the whole idea of this is a celebration of my relationship at the university with the students,” said Pearson, who first joined the UCSB faculty in 1990, and served as artistic director of SBDT from 1991-2011. “Now that I’m retiring, I thought, ‘One last show,’ and ‘Aspire’ is that. It’s based on my time working with students and seeing them aspire, seeing how passionate and filled with energy they are, and willing to work so hard to become excellent.”

The heart of the show, then, is in its titular work, “Aspire,” one of two pieces being premiered in the concert. Featuring 27 dancers and inspired, Pearson said, by his years at UCSB, the dance explores how young performers discover their potential

and find their voice as artists.

Also having its world premiere is the trio piece, “Flutter,” which Pearson described as “a dance about the flight of the imagination,” inspired by the energy of fluttering wings.

“Amuse Bouche” will lead off the concert, serving, as Pearson put it, as a “fast, energetic opener, to whet the audience’s kinesthetic appetite.” He composed the piece for SBDT’s 40th anniversary; the company premiered it in January and will reprise the performance for Pearson’s farewell.

Providing a poetic bookend to the concert is “Maze of Grace,” choreographed in 1991, the very first new work that Pearson set on SBDT shortly after arriving on campus after spending 15 years in New York as a professional dancer and choreographer. “Maze of Grace” is being performed here by current UCSB senior dance majors, who will take the piece on tour to Europe this spring.

“It is a powerful experience to work with these passionate young artists,” Pearson said, reflecting on his UCSB dance students over the decades. “They aspire for the best in themselves, always trying to improve, to be the best they can be. I have had the honor of working with them from the ages of 18 to 22 — amazing years in a dancer’s career.”

Tickets for “Aspire” and additional details about the concert are available online via the UCSB Department of Theater and Dance website.

About UC Santa Barbara

The University of California, Santa Barbara is a leading research institution that also provides a comprehensive liberal arts learning experience. Our academic community of faculty, students, and staff is characterized by a culture of interdisciplinary collaboration that is responsive to the needs of our multicultural and global society. All of this takes place within a living and learning environment like no other, as we draw inspiration from the beauty and resources of our extraordinary location at the edge of the Pacific Ocean.