Mary Beth Quinn centers life on dance

"The feeling of being on stage is like being in another world. It's a beautiful experience," said senior Mary Beth Quinn, dance and English major. "It's the feeling of being alone with one's self."

At age six Quinn became so impressed by a performance of the Nutcracker Ballet that she decided to become a dancer. She took classes at the Omaha Academy of Ballet and became a member of the Omaha Ballet in 1973 and a member of the Creighton Company of Dancers in 1975. Dancing for both companies required too much time for Quinn so she quit membership with the Omaha Ballet but continued dancing for Company of Dancers.

Quinn has taken different types of dance but ballet is her favorite. "Ballet is the way I've been pretty much trained in," she said. "I love pointe work because I can do many more things and I also like the sensation of being up on my toes and feeling like a ballerina."

Pointe work is beautiful but requires a lot of effort and sacrifices and can be very painful, she said. Many times, Quinn has had to perform with blisters on her feet, trying to ignore the pain and still show love and happiness for the performance, she said. "One learns to ignore pain and get used to certain amounts of it," Quinn said.

Quinn's family has given much support and help throughout her dancing career. "I'm very thankful to my mother because when I was in third grade I almost quit because classes were getting too boring," she said. "But she made me continue and now I still keep my classes because I like performing too much."

Quinn said she performs much better during practice than in rehearsals due to the exciting combination of the lights, costumes, make-up and audience. But she emphasized the impact the audience response has on her. "It is the audience which really makes the difference," she said.

On stage Quinn becomes lost in the feeling of movement. "The worst part is right before the first stage curtain is opened," she said. "Then I try to avoid nervousness by thinking about people who make me relax. I think about my mom, my father or my twin brother Jim."

Jim, also a Creighton student, is Quinn's biggest critic but also her greatest support, she said. As brother and sister they are very close and do a lot of things together.

Behind the stage, dance demands so much work it can be very tiring and frustrating, Quinn said. She normally puts in nine hours of ballet classes a week but during rehearsals seven to 10 more hours are added to the previous nine.

"A lot of times I see people going to the library while I'm rehearsing and it's frustrating because then I tell myself, that is what I should be doing, studying like the rest of the students," Quinn said.

Combining both her majors is not easy. "I try to study at night after my rehearsals but sometimes I get home too tired to study," she said.

Quinn is presently preparing her thesis show, which all dance majors have to organize to graduate. Her show will contain three to four different dancing pieces portraying a variety of dancing styles Quinn has learned throughout her career.

"I have to organize everything in my show, from choreography to costumes, lighting and program design," Quinn said.

The show will be held May 4 and 5 in the Interim Performing Arts Center. Quinn said she is very happy to have the facilities of a real stage, a privilege seniors in previous years did not have.

An important aspect of Quinn's show is the requirement of a piece performed just by children. Quinn has already started teaching second and third graders to perform this piece.

She finds this teaching experience very interesting because the children not only learn from her but she learns a lot from them too. "Many times I underestimate what they can do but they really surprise me because they can do much more than what I normally expect from them," she said.

Before each class session, Quinn said she feels a bit apprehensive and nervous because she is not used to teaching children on a constant basis. But since the clasp starts she said she relaxes right away. "By the end of the class I'm very excited and full of energy, especially with my thesis group because they are very good," Quinn said.

Quinn is also presently rehearsing for the Company of Dancers performance which will be held in April. One of the pieces she'll perform is Japanese, choreographed by Saeko Ichinobe, Japanese artistic director and choreographer of Saeko Ichinobe and Company, Inc. Quinn said she finds this piece a challenge due to the slow and delicate movements required.

"It's very different from the type of dance I'm used to," she said. "The simple motions are the most difficult to perform."

Quinn's future plans are not clear yet. She has applied for Law school, but if she is not accepted, she does not know exactly what she will do, she said.

From a dancing point of view, Quinn would not like to become a member of a big company, because although it would be her dream, she would also have to be competitive and aggressive and she is not that way, she said.

Teaching dance is a possibility in Quinn's future plans. "I did not like the idea of teaching before, but I really enjoy it now and I would like to combine teaching with some other type of profession," she said.

Future plans that Quinn is sure about are that she will dance until she cannot dance anymore, she said.

Quinn's first performance was in 1980 in the Nutcracker with the Omaha Ballet. Until 1978, it was a Christmas tradition for her to perform in the Nutcracker.

Quinn has performed throughout Nebraska and other Midwestern states. In 1978 she took dance classes for three weeks with the London Royal Academy of Dancing. And in 1980 she took classes with a School for Dancers in Copenhagen, Denmark.

Above: Quinn performs her regular exercise routine. Far right: Quinn presents her pointe work, which she enjoys most. Right: What a long day!

story and photos by Cristina Flagler