



JONATHAN QUILTER | DISPATCH

Dancers from Otterbein University in "Dance 2014: Tell Tale Poe"

# Author's eerie stories, poetry put into motion

By Bill Mayr  
FOR THE COLUMBUS DISPATCH

**D**arkness comes early this time of year — all the better to consider the mysterious, macabre writings of Edgar Allan Poe.

In a twist that Poe would surely approve, Otterbein University students will perform dances inspired by his works.

"Dance 2014: Tell Tale Poe," featuring faculty and student choreography, will be presented today through Sunday by the Department of Theater and Dance.

The works were choreographed to poems such as *The Raven* and *Annabel Lee* as well as the short story *The Tell-Tale Heart*.

Student choreographers Natasha Natraj and Madison Tinder, both seniors, created a

piece for the poem *Come Little Children*.

As celebrated as his writing is today, Poe had a difficult life in 19th-century America.

His father abandoned the family early on, and his mother died while he was a toddler. He later became estranged from his foster family. Poe served in the Army, was accepted into West Point, but then was booted out.

He married his 13-year-old cousin; she died at age 24. All the while, Poe struggled to earn a living by editing magazines and literary journals as well as writing short stories and poetry.

He died at age 40 in 1849. The cause is unknown, but speculation ranges from syphilis to epilepsy to rabies.

His writing influenced detective stories and gothic fiction — but dance? Not so much.

## AT A GLANCE

### Otterbein University Department of Theater and Dance

COWAN HALL, 30 S. GROVE ST.,  
WESTERVILLE

**Contact:** 614-823-1109,  
www.otterbein.edu

**Showtimes:** 7:30 p.m. today,  
8 p.m. Friday and Saturday, and  
2 p.m. Sunday

**Tickets:** \$18

Stella Hiatt Kane, artistic director of the upcoming program and an Otterbein faculty member, broached the idea of turning Poe works into movement to fellow faculty members in the spring.

"At first, we were 'Really, Stella? Poe?' But the more we talked about this, the more we

thought this would work," said dance faculty member Scott Brown.

Kane credited Maggie Savoie, a senior who will dance in the concert, with the idea.

The concert will be a multimedia one.

"We use music," Kane said, "but we have voice-over work — the voice of 'Poe' reading some of his poetry. One of our students, Jordan Donica, has done the voice-over. Then we have screen projections, interpretive projections.

"The premise of the concert is based on what Poe would say: 'I don't know if I'm dreaming this or is it real?' What's the dividing line between madness and genius?"

The choreography is less a literal reflection of Poe's writing and more an interpretation of his underlying thoughts and emotions.

More than 80 students — dancers and production crew members — will participate.

Sixteen will dance to faculty member Kathy Bartelt's interpretation of *The Raven*, Poe's poem about an anguished man's descent into madness as he ponders the loss of his beloved Lenore.

"They say (Lenore) was created to represent the women in (Poe's) life that he lost," Bartelt said.

"It's the whole thing about life and death, and 'Can I be a part of her life?' — and, of course, it's nevermore."

Brown selected *The Tell-Tale Heart*, the story of a murderer who hides his dismembered victim beneath the floorboards, only to be tormented by the sound of the beating heart of the victim.

Brown's dance reflects the pressure of guilt.

"I created a room, with the dancers (as) the room, which gets smaller and tighter, pushing in on itself," Brown said. "As the piece progresses, the main character, the space around him gets smaller and smaller and my figures are reaching out, trying to manipulate him."

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