

HOME FRONT

Inland Empire Home Remodeling
and Design Show comes to Ontario

PAGE U6



INSIDE:

TV grid U2
 Entertainment U2-3
 Annie's Mailbox U4
 Comics U4-5
 Health See A16-17

Sacred dance

■ Liturgical dance can draw us closer to the spirit of the divine. A dance concert in Redlands features performers from throughout Southern California.

By Priscilla Nordyke Roden

Staff Writer

They move to the music in exquisite symmetry, arms up-lifted, caught in the moment.

This dance has everything to do with love. The dancers are moved by the spirit.

"The arts are God's

idea, and when we fulfill the biblical model of giving glory to God, the church is blessed," says dancer and choreographer Mary Margaret Bawden, director of SonLight Dance at Trinity Church in Redlands. "It strengthens the spiritual experience."

Sacred dance — a form of worship that existed 1,000 years ago — is making a comeback in churches throughout the country.

In Redlands, a number of dance groups will perform at the SonLight Christian Dance Concert, at 4 p.m. Saturday at Trinity Church, 1551 Reservoir Road.

The rise of Christian rock in the MTV era, along with music videos, has helped raise interest in sacred dance.

The movement isn't confined to evangelical churches like Trinity. It has crossed the lines of many denominations, including Baptist and Roman Catholic.

Although dance was banished from the early Christian church in the Middle Ages, when the art form was associated with sins of the flesh, the Bible is clear to many.

Among the biblical references to dance, Psalm 149:3 states, "Let them praise his name with the dance; let them sing praises unto him with the tumbrel and harp."

"We're told to worship in spirit and in truth," Bawden says. "Dancers are modeling

See DANCE/U3

IF YOU GO

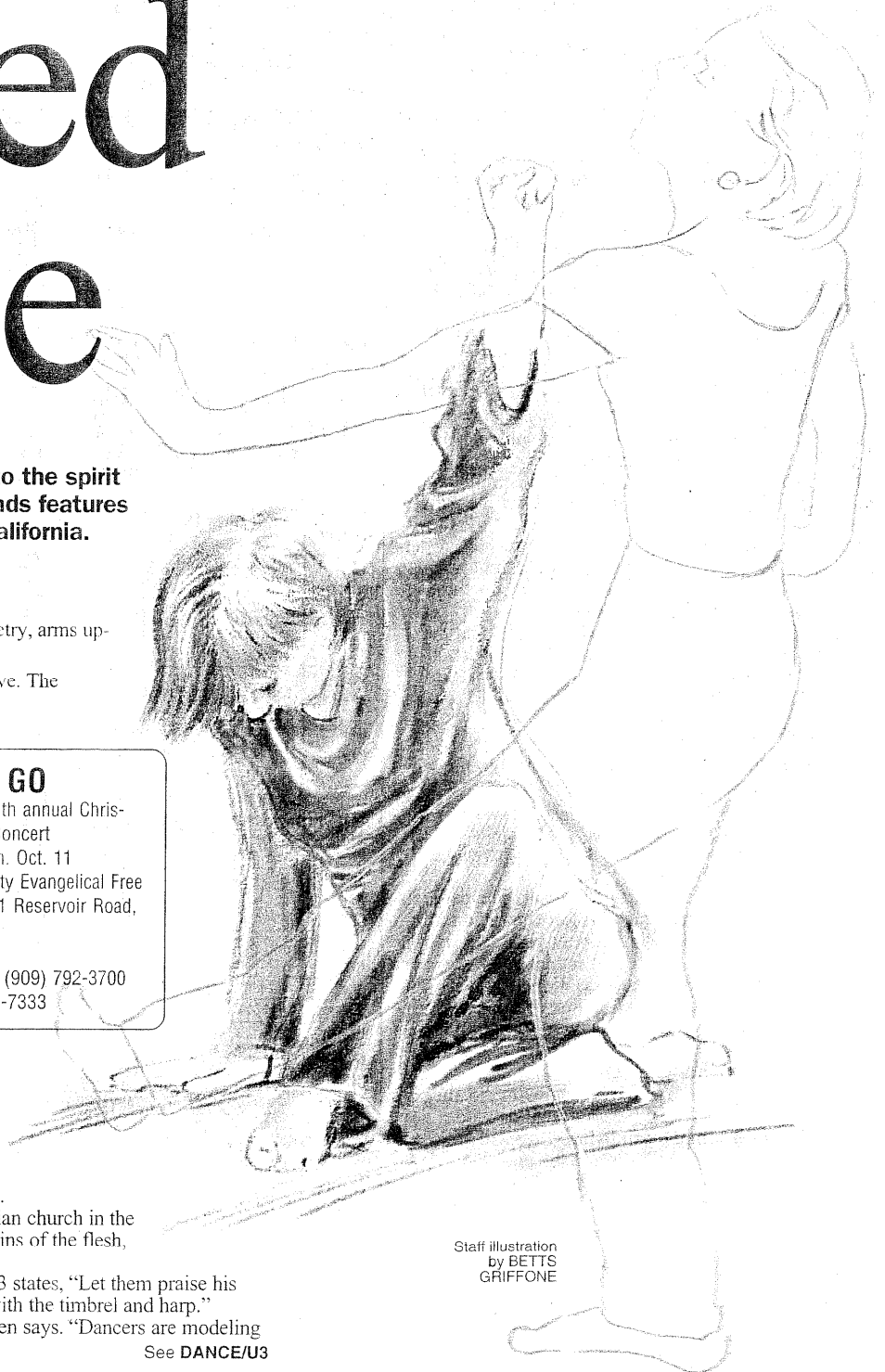
What: Seventh annual Christian Dance Concert

When: 4 p.m. Oct. 11

Where: Trinity Evangelical Free Church, 1551 Reservoir Road, Redlands

Cost: Free

Information: (909) 792-3700 or (909) 335-7333



Staff illustration
by BETTS
GRIFFONE

Dance

Continued from U1

what everyone should be doing on a daily basis, they're modeling the lifestyle of loving the Lord with their hearts and minds. We're told in scripture . . . to worship with our whole self. When you get your whole self involved, it's hard to be pretentious."

The spiritual connection between dancers and their creator spills off the stage, into the congregation, she says.

"In liturgical churches, people stand and kneel. There is movement that tends to deepen their worship experience."

The question of what exactly is sacred dance comes up frequently.

"Dance is divinity, a natural state of grace in which we all reside," says Iris Stewart, author of "Sacred Woman, Sacred Dance: Awakening Spirituality Through Movement and Ritual (Inner Traditions International), in her book's introduction. "In its sacred form, dance is a language that reunites the body, soul, and mind."

About liturgical dance, she writes: "It is becoming more and more evident, both here in the United States and around the world, that liturgical dance can help us rediscover the profound human expression that communes with and draws us closer to the power of the spirit of the divine.

"Dance is particularly timely and suitable to worship today as more and more people begin to reaffirm the human body, recovering the body-spirit connections. This is not an abstract theory, as participants can attest who see and feel the power, the majesty, and the prayerfulness of dance in the context of liturgy. Dance can express a deep sense of reverence, a profound participation in worship, arousing joy and union."

The Sacred Dance Guild has been one of the leaders in bringing dance back into worship.

The guild believes that sacred dance is a catalyst for spiritual growth and change "through the integration of mind, body and spirit."

Kathryn Mihelick, development director for the guild, says sacred dance is a personal matter. "Movement is the universal language which integrates us, speaks across cultures, and transcends the spoken word to manifest the spirit."



Bawden

Bawden, the director of Trinity's SonLight, calls dancing "prayer-in-motion."

She's been worshipping through movement for years, she says.

Although trained in ballet, Bawden turned her attention to modern dance at an early age. She received a bachelor of arts degree in modern dance form from the University of California, Riverside, and taught dance at Crafton College and Mt. San Jacinto Junior College.

After the births of three children, she taught creative movement and worship for children in the Creative University summer arts program, and wrote a Sunday School curriculum for elementary school-age children, which she taught at the 1995 National Christian Dance Conference.

In 1994, Bawden was asked to develop a movement ministry called SonLight. The group placed in the finalist category of the "Festival of the Starts" choreography festival at the McCallum Theatre in Palm Springs in November 2002.

She also taught a workshop on choreography for the National Sacred Dance Guild Conference in Claremont, and has choreographed the annual Children's Christmas Musical, which attracts 5,000 to 7,000 people to Trinity Church in Redlands each year.

In addition, Bawden developed a curriculum called "Soul-to-Sole Movement," which is the backbone of a Christian Choreography retreat scheduled Oct. 14-15 at El Carmelo Retreat House in Redlands.

For information about the retreat, call Geneva Chinnock at (909) 792-3700.

Contact writer Priscilla Nurdyke-Roden at (909) 386-3864 or via e-mail at priscilla.roden@sbsun.com.