



Times photo by Tom Roster

Muscles are like clay to dance instructor Patrick Scully, who showed students from St. Mary's School and the Little Falls

Middle School how to stretch Monday.

# Improvisation

## Students learn to express emotions through dancing

In the dimly lit Charles D. Martin Auditorium, eight student dancers sat quietly in a loose, open circle on the floor of the stage.

For a dance rehearsal, the room seemed uncommonly quiet, I thought. No music. Only the muffled voices of students in the hallway outside the auditorium could be heard as dance instructor Patrick Scully murmured directions to his fledgling dancers.

From a sitting position where they had been stretching back muscles, the dancers flattened their backs to the floor. Slowly they extended jean-clad legs to point toes upward. Just as slowly, each leg was lowered to the floor.

Muscles are like clay, Scully had explained earlier. They need to be stretched before you work them. Like clay, the longer you work them, the easier they stretch when you dance.

"All right," the quiet voice continued. "Your muscles are warmed up."

The volume of Scully's voice grew as he urged them to their feet. "Form two lines then stretch your arms out to the person across from you."

The relaxed quiet that had enveloped the stage through the stretching exercises was replaced by small talk from the dancers rising to follow his directions.

Scully, 29, a professional dancer and choreographer, is in Little Falls to share his love for modern dance with high school and middle school stu-



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dents in Little Falls.

The sandy-haired young man who majored in biology and languages at the University of Minnesota once thought he would like to be a linguist. He took a few dance classes in the physical education department, liked it, then suddenly found himself teaching dancing in the Free University of West Berlin.

Today, Scully is an independent dancer who spends several months each year teaching dance in the schools.

For several hours of each day since

he has been in Little Falls he has worked with students interested in the performing arts. He teaches them some of the basic concepts of the exciting type of dancing he loves so much.

Dance improvisation, Scully says, "opens pathways of creativity to students." Students don't learn dance routines, but learn instead to use movement to describe ideas, to express emotions.

Like a poet uses words to express feelings, a dancer uses body movements to express what is inside his heart and mind, Scully said. Sometimes music is used, sometimes not.

Most of what the students will do when they dance begins with exercises to prepare the body for movement. The exercises on the stage continued as I watched and listened.

"I'm going to fall forward," Scully said as his dancers extended their arms, "and you're going to catch me."

The thought of six pairs of arms supporting a 6-foot 9-inch, 200-pound dancer brought some questioning looks and some murmurs.

These disappeared as Scully leaped through the air and landed lightly in his students' arms.

After only one experience, his dancers had learned something about weight and also about balance and counterbalance.

Once all the dancers had performed

a leap, all learned a good deal about body contact, and the importance of trust dancers must have in one another.

Scully hopes to teach his students how their bodies can be used as a tool to express what they're thinking. Through the use of exercises for relaxation and with lessons in balance, he hopes to see his "dancers move their own way."

When they're relaxed, he says, whatever movement they make is right; there are no "wrong" moves when dancers are expressing what they feel. Learning about weight support between two bodies rolling and moving through space develops skills in balance and movement.

Scully's two-week residency is sponsored by Northwestern Bell Telephone, the Minnesota State Arts Board and Young Audiences Inc., a Minneapolis-based booking agency that specializes in artist-in-residence programs in the schools.

At 7:45 p.m. Thursday, 16 of Scully's students will present a program for the public in the Charles D. Martin Auditorium.

Theme for the program, in which Scully will dance alone and also with his students, is from the story of the Phoenix in theology, he said. The music is "Warsaw" by Brian Eno, one of Scully's favorite composers.

"It's a reminder that dying and rebirth is with us on every level always," he said. "I thought about this in Warsaw several years ago, when I compared the new Warsaw to the devastated city I'd seen pictured after Hitler's troops left in defeat."

"We've talked about Warsaw and also about the things that have happened in their lives — the death of grandparents, a pet, someone they loved."

By the time Scully leaves, he believes his students will have learned that "dance is more than just movement for its own sake and there's more to dance than movement."