

THE MORNING CALL

DANCE REVIEW

Dancers at Lafayette College tap timeless sources of energy

By KATHRYN WILLIAMS

When the performers of Wednesday night's Jazz Tap Revue at Lafayette College stood in line together to perform the Shim Sham Shimmy for a capacity audience at the Williams Center, it was almost surprising that hidden within the amazing range of sounds they had made that evening was a common language they could speak.

Taking turns throughout the evening, each had proven that he or she was a star in his or her own right. Side by side at the end, their spirits would not be squelched by the necessity of performing in unison, and their striking dissimilarities were a pleasant reminder of the individual styles on display throughout the evening.

Easton resident and Muhlenberg College dance instructor Shelley Oliver, former artistic director of Manhattan Tap in New York City, was up first. Her style is very erect, her rapid-fire taps happening right underneath her. Oliver's command of her long limbs illustrates that while tap is about using your muscles, it is just as much about when to let them go.

Oliver performed a nostalgic, choreographed tribute to Bill "Bojangles" Robinson, who gained popularity in movies with Shirley Temple, to a score composed by bass player Lynn Seaton. She was equally as entertaining in an extended improvisation performed in silence.

Herbin van Cayseele was next, and immediately charmed the audience. His style is less contained than Oliver's, more athletic like Gene Kelly, and his arms and legs sliced through every quadrant of his kinesphere, with extra energy spilling all over the place. Since he is tall, the effect was even more dramatic.

Unhappy with the sound from the unre-

sponsive dance floor, van Cayseele staked a claim to the more clearly resonant wooden stairs at stage right, and the 8-inch wide wooden strip at the edge of the proscenium. When he did return to center stage, his energetic response to the absence of spatial constraints seemed to coax more sound from the floor.

Venerable vaudeville veteran Buster Brown announced that he will be 82 next month, adding, "I am the oldest tap dancer alive." Brown continued to alternate movement passages with stand-up comedy. Stiff through the back, Brown still floated above the floor like a hovercraft, allowing his taps to strike the floor at select times. He was tentative at first, but as Brown warmed up he let the effects of his foot motions ripple through the rest of his body.

Philadelphia partners LaVaughn Robinson, now in his late 60s, and his younger partner, Germaine Ingram, are mentor and student, but the warmth, wit and mutual admiration inherent to their act made them seem like father and daughter. They both sparkled, but in decidedly different ways: her cat-like movements had a bright polish; his truer, rougher edge was distinguished by the well-earned silver in his hair. Their precision duets were full of movement surprises, such as off-balance suspensions and airborne moments, which suggested that Ingram has no intention of letting her partner age.

A special treat was a surprise appearance by Philadelphia's Edith Hunt, who in her 70s is a bundle of singing, dancing and smiling energy upon whom time has had a minimal effect.

The concert was arranged by Lafayette artist-in-residence Dave Leonhardt, a jazz pianist, who with Seaton on bass and Bobby Durham on drums made a worthy backdrop to the hoofers.

Kathryn Williams is a free-lance writer.