

People Destined to Dance

The Saga of Tandy Beal and Co.

Beal, Tandy
by Rick Hildreth

YOU'D be hard-pressed to find anyone who represents Santa Cruz to the world better than Tandy Beal, Jon Scoville and their dance company. Tandy Beal and Co. have an international reputation as a leading dance troupe, and its two leaders exemplify nearly all that Santa Cruzans take for granted.

Scoville was one of the first employees at Bookshop Santa Cruz. He played bass in Women and Children First, a jazz-rock act that frequented the Catalyst back when that club was on Front Street.

Beal's first concert in Santa Cruz happened in 1971. And while she can sound as cosmic as any street astrologer, she's shown she has a tough business acumen, keeping her company of dancers and support personnel employed.

Many Santa Cruzans know Beal only as the choreographer of that weird version of the "Nutcracker Suite," featuring jugglers, acrobats and other decidedly non-ballet elements that shows up every few years. Yet there's much more to her than the vaudevillian who put puppets in a holiday ballet.

Her newest effort, "Khoros," opening this weekend at UCSC, is a blend of egos and art forms. Beal choreographed dances to new choral music by composers Lou Harrison, Joanna Lande, Bobby McFerrin, Gordon Mumma and Michael West.

Scoville, Beal's primary composer and long-term romantic interest, also contributed to the show, collaborating with her father, film and Broadway actor John Beal.

Beal doesn't present any of the mannerisms you'd expect of an internationally famous choreographer. It's easy to picture her helping the technical crew take down the lights and the set at the end of a show's run; her dancer's leotard and tights replaced by blue jeans and a T-shirt, her mane of dark hair pulled up under a painter's cap, a crescent wrench tied to her belt loop.

Beal isn't a dancer as much as she is a performer, an entertainer in the classic mold. Sure, she's a fine dancer

and an inventive choreographer, but she's a natural-born actor and comedian as well.

She's almost what you might expect if the character grew up that Judy Garland played in all those "Hey kids, let's put on a show" movies.

Rather, Beal might be like that if Judy's character had been seriously involved in Santa Cruz' counterculture during the 1960s and '70s, had two gifted actors for parents and had been a straight-A student in Connecticut private schools as a child.

Although her name is the main feature of "Tandy Beal and Co.," she constantly stresses the contributions of everybody in the company.

"One of the things that keeps showing up in my life is that I keep creating opportunities for other people," she said. "I don't like being a leader, I don't like the power that leadership entails. I don't like it, but I'm always in a position of it, and it's been (like that) since I was a child."

And yes, Tandy is her real name, according to her birth certificate. Beal is the stage name she borrowed from her father.

"Jon says 'Tandy' is short for 'Radio Shack,'" she said.

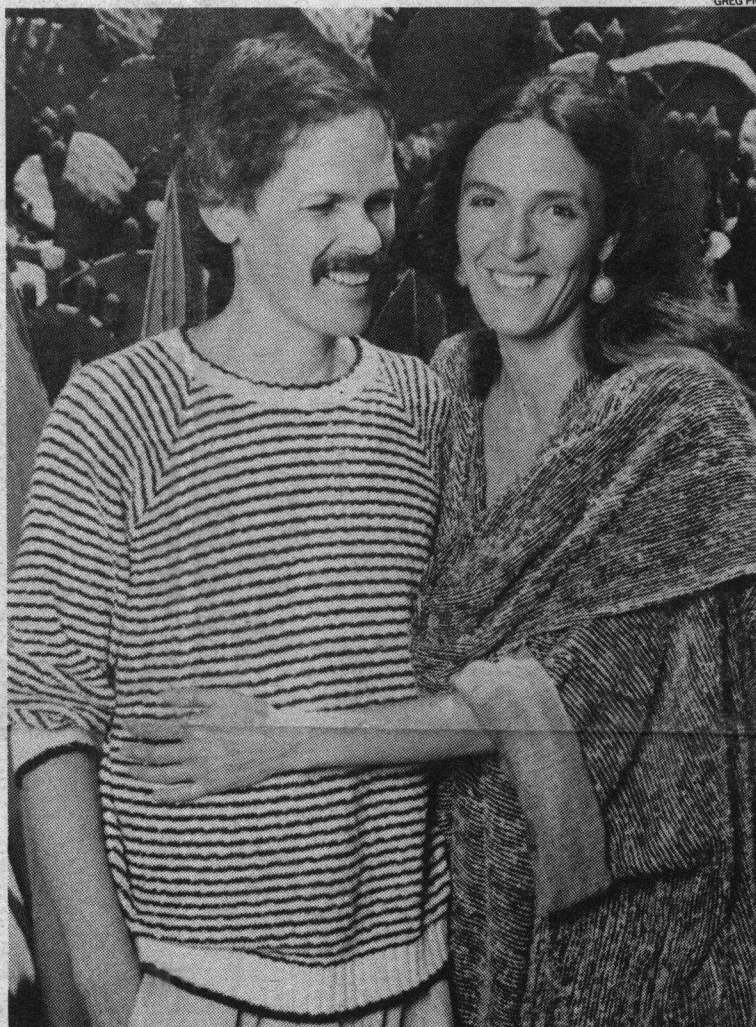
Born in a Trunk

"I was born in Hollywood. Somebody has to be," Beal said. Her mother was Helen Craig, a respected stage actress. Much of her early life was spent shuttling between Los Angeles and New York, depending on where her parents were working.

"At a certain point, my parents thought it was terrible if we all grew up in New York City and that was our experience of childhood, so we moved out to the country and we had no neighbors for miles, we had an out-house, no heat. It was intense," she said.

If Killingworth, Conn., wasn't exactly a major cultural center ("They read Pinnocchio out loud to the eighth grade."), Beal's youth wasn't without excitement.

"As a kid, you have no point of reference, to me it was just totally normal that breakfast was a production. It was totally normal that I had these completely theatrical human



Tandy Beal and Jon Scoville: Partners and collaborators.

beings for parents. People wanted to come and visit my house. Not because of me, but because they knew they'd play hard with my mother," said Beal.

Her talent and remarkable success as a dancer may be due more to genetics than her upbringing. "My parents bent over backwards to make sure they didn't push us into the profession like many of the people of their era — the Fondas, there's a whole lot of people you could name, they pushed their kids into the theater. So (Beal's parents) bent over backwards to keep us out. And here I'm a dancer, and my sister is writing plays."

Her first performance didn't bode well for her future success, however.

"I sang 'Molly Malone' at the age of five as a solo. My mother and I hated performing after that," she said. "It was a traumatic experience for me, just at age 5 and singing all the stanzas, all the verses of this alone. It was a huge event and afterwards, I never wanted to perform again."

Her mother's death two years ago was part of the inspiration for last year's "The Time Falling Bodies Take to Light," a spiritual and personal

work, further influenced by a long tour of Japan. It was her way of working out her emotions about her mother's passing.

Beal is extremely family-oriented. She sees her "for lack of a better word, hard-core (company) members" as a family. "We all have separate lives. But when we're working together, the trust is deep."

Although she never worked onstage with her mother, Beal has performed with her father, once during a Los Angeles engagement of her unusual "Nutcracker" and twice at Cabrillo College during a children's dance concert, "Listening to the Earth." She remembered being backstage with him at "Nutcracker," waiting for the curtain to rise.

"Sometimes, when I'm in an audience, just before a show starts, tears will come up for me, because I'm so aware of all these people about to make themselves utterly vulnerable. I don't feel that backstage, but I realize the emotion is invested there. And to stand backstage with my father before the Nutcracker opened, the two of us — he sitting down and me usually standing behind him with my

hands on his shoulders or sitting on the floor next to him — just waiting for that moment, knowing you're just about to go on stage. There's nothing like that. I'll never forget that."

Beal has great respect for her father's talent, born of a critical eye and not familial loyalty. Once, she was in New York when a revival movie theater presented a film her father had done when he was 25, a 1937 comedy featuring William Powell and Myrna Loy, "Double Wedding." John Beal had agreed to speak before the film, so the two Beals watched it together.

"It was hysterical, it was so wonderful because my father did a persona I had never known. It was a wonderful evening, we just laughed our heads off. It wasn't because it was an in-joke or anything, it was a very funny movie," she said.

True Love

The road to Santa Cruz began for Beal when she met Scoville, then an undergraduate literature major at Yale University in New Haven. Her parents had sent her to a private school there, upset that "Pinnocchio" was part of the eighth-grade curriculum in Killingworth.

Scoville and Beal were thrown together by mutual friends for a blind date: a "hootenany" at Elliot's Bookstore.

They both had a marvelous time. However, Scoville's conspiring friend dropped a bombshell the next day.

"He said, 'Bet you don't know how old Tandy is?' And I went, 'Oh, shit,' just because he phrased it that way. I knew she had to be young," said Scoville. "And because I was only six days shy of my 20th birthday, I was a little 'old.' I'd figured she was 17, the way she looked and the way she acted, and I said, 'Oh, God, what is she, 16?' And he said, 'No, she's 14.'"

"I made the person who fixed us up swear they wouldn't tell what my age was," said Beal. "Of course, they told him immediately. But his humanity didn't freak out that I was a whole lot younger. He could see the person in that, which is kind of unusual at that age, and not just go, 'Oh, my God!'"

Scoville was born in Johnstown, Penn., and raised there, and in Connecticut at West Hartford, Cornwall and New Haven. His mother is a musician and his father a Presbyterian minister. Scoville, like many ministers' sons, rebelled against the church.

Aside from church choir, Scoville didn't exhibit much interest in music until he saw how his brother's guitar-



Healthy and imaginative: Tandy Beal, floored, and her jumping Khoros troupe of Sara Wilbourne, Emile Dyer, Erik Stern, Scott Marsh, Kathleen McClintock, Kirkland Smidt, Tim Harling, Diane Hsu, Weyland Quintero and Ellen Sevy.

playing attracted women. "The girls were sure flocking to him. And I thought, for the basest of reasons, I ought to pick up a guitar," he said.

He never did get his literature degree from Yale, dropping out two weeks before the end of his junior year, after receiving inspiration by watching a group of dedicated musicians at a concert in New York.

"I was really asking myself what I was doing with literature, what I was doing reading about other people's lives; it seemed to be very much a second-hand world, and I had the classic James Joyce epiphany of seeing people totally involved with music. And I went back to Yale the next day and resigned, and never regretted it."

Somewhere Over The Rainbow

After a year of hanging around New York, Scoville decided to join the exodus from the East to the West Coast. At Yale he had worked for Harry Berger, who had moved to Santa Cruz to set up the literature department at the new UC campus. Berger gave Scoville a place to stay, and within one week, Scoville had a job at the cannery and a house on 8th Avenue (at \$60 per month rent).

Beal was a frequent visitor, finally settling here in 1971, first giving a workshop, then teaching on a regular basis at Cabrillo.

Scoville is mostly self-taught as a musician and composer. He did take a course in church harmonies at Cabrillo; he wanted to skip the next three courses and move on to the 20th century harmonies class, but the instructor wouldn't let him. Three years later, the instructor came to a Beal dance concert Scoville had scored, and came backstage to congratulate the two of them.

"I asked him if I could take the course now, and he said 'no. But you've made your point,'" Scoville said.

He works mostly with synthesizers and digital samplers these days, but he came to high-tech music by building his own percussion instruments. He co-wrote a book, "Sound Designs," with the woodworker who helped him build the instruments, and bought a synthesizer with the money he made from the book.

Despite the obvious disparity between the Scoville and Beal families (deeply religious people don't often get along with show people), a movie of John Beal's put the actors in God's good graces: "Little Minister," a 1934 film with Katharine Hepburn, featured the elder Beal as the minister. When the film was released, Scoville's father was a new minister, and found inspiration in Beal's characterization.

"When (Scoville's father) found out who it was, and what role he played, he knew immediately. 'John

Beal? The same one?,' he asked. And I said, 'yeah, I think so.' He (John Beal) could do no wrong," Scoville said.

The Beals virtually adopted Scoville, and he said he was raised by them almost as much as by his own parents, at least in terms of arts and culture.

His piece for "Khoros" has lyrics by John Beal. An almost musical-comedy number about the bear market on Wall Street, this particular collaboration points out the family nature of Tandy Beal's organization.

She and Jon have been working together since 1971, when she convinced him to write a score for her first Santa Cruz concert, "Sixty Odd Minutes."

"I think our relationship is very much deepened by being able to enter the world of poetry together," she said. "Our most intense arguments have to do with our work together. It's not other stuff, because we trust each other so deeply that when we hit conflict, it's profound."

Yet, they both agree that possibly their finest collaboration was produced under the worst conditions. It was a commissioned work for the Oakland Ballet, in August, and they had 30 hours to produce 30 minutes of dance, Scoville said.

"It was just too pressured a situation, and we look back and we're very happy with the results. But we want to avoid, at all costs, the constraints,

the pressures. They don't call it a deadline for nothing. Because you're dead when you cross it," he said.

Company

Beal likes to call Scoville co-artistic director. However, that's "a title Tandy likes to give me when there are things she can blame on me, or responsibilities she can ask me to do," said Scoville, who prefers to be called music director.

Beal, of course, sees it differently. "I'll ask him about a decision and he'll say, 'well, your name's on the letterhead.'"

Because her name is the most prominent in the company, Beal often thinks Scoville, the dancers, tech crew and office staff get short shrift.

"I think, in the public eye, they see 'Tandy Beal and Co.,' and so if they make a donation, is it to me personally? No. It's for these people's work, to keep it happening, to pay for composers, to pay for scenic designers, to pay for dancers," she said.

Much of Beal's time is spent trying to keep the company afloat and its people fed, an increasingly difficult task.

"I'm trying to understand how to live as a dance company in the '80s, because the finances are really very difficult," she said.

Beal is well known for allowing her company greater freedom than most.

"I really believe one mind doesn't work as well as several," she said.

Dancers come to Beal through professional circles or through her work at Cabrillo, UCSC and the University of Utah (where Scoville also teaches). She finds her present crew incredibly inspiring.

The company has 10 dancers now. Kathleen McClintock, Ellen Sevy and Sara Wilbourne have been with Beal since 1980. Kirkland Smith began his dance training with Beal while in his mid-20s, and is now in the company for the first time. Tim Harling is a former member of the Nikolais Dance Theater (where Beal once bruised her insteps), with Beal for the second year, exhibiting a strong desire to leave New York. Scott Marsh is in his third year with Beal, Wayland Quintero his second. Diane Hsu was in a 1985 performance of the "Nutcracker," and appears as a ninja in the next James Bond film. Erik Stern started his training with Beal.

"This particular group of people came together last year for 'The Time Falling Bodies ...' and, as Jon said, it was the 20th year of the summer of love. It was astounding there was so much genuine generosity and tenderness towards each other, and I'm talking at this point about daily courtesy, talking about taking care of, helping each other, ego not being an issue, about people allowing me the space to be who I was.

"People giving freely of their creativity, people opening their hearts, and it's clear to me that I do my best work with people who open their hearts, because it's like an invisible bridge. You start walking on air and you're supported by these people's faith," she said.

Beal is also grateful for her background, and the people she has known.

"You're who you are and what you have. I'm so grateful I've had the chance to perform with my father, that I can work with my partner and that the two of them can work together, that we can all work together. •

"Khoros: New American Music and Dance" features Tandy Beal's new choreography to new choral works by Lou Harrison, Joanna Lande, Bobby McFerrin, Gordon Mumma, Jon Scoville and John Beal, and Michael B. West. Shows are at 8 p.m. Friday through Sunday at UCSC's Performing Arts Theater. Tickets are at BASS, the Civic box office and Cymbaline. 429-1324.