

# Dance Alabama: A singular sensation

**By Ellen Johnson | Staff Reporter**



*The student-choreographed show, Dance Alabama, will be in Morgan Auditorium Nov. 10-13. CW | Layton Dudley*

The lights come up, and 15 dancers are standing on the stage. Soft blue lights reveal that each is costumed in an oversized T-shirt. They are silent, but they are about to use their bodies to tell a story that doesn't need any words at all.

“It puts an interesting feeling in your stomach,” said Alexandra Mannings, a sophomore majoring in dance and physics. “It’s nice to be the first thing the audience sees to draw

them into the whole show, but it's a little nerve-wracking.”

Mannings is one of the 15 dancers performing in the opening number of next week's performances of “Dance Alabama!,” the biannual show in which students choreograph, design, rehearse and perform their own dances in the hopes of being featured in the final performances. The opening dance is one of 31 student-choreographed dances that will be performed in this semester's “Dance Alabama!” run.

Brianna Milner, a senior majoring in dance and chemical engineering, is the student choreographer of the opener. Like any other dance in the “Dance Alabama!” lineup, the whole process began with the auditions.

“At those auditions, it's time for student choreographers to pick who they want in their pieces, and a hundred-something people audition,” Milner said. “It's kind of a battle because dancers can only be in up to three dances.”

After a choreographer chooses dancers and the rehearsal process is in full swing, cuts for the final show begin.

“You have these things called showings where the dance professors watch all the pieces one by one, and they give feedback of what they like and don't like,” Milner said. “After we do a couple showings, they pick who they want in the show and the order of the show.”

Having been involved since her freshman year and having choreographed a total of five dances for “Dance Alabama!,” Milner is familiar with the process of getting a dance through the various stages. This year, however, her dance, titled “Don't Look at Me,” is different in one aspect.

“It's a weird prop – we're using shirts,” Milner said. “I just wanted to do something different than the normal contemporary piece that I normally do.”

The dancers use T-shirts as props, using them in different ways throughout the piece. Sometimes they keep them on, sometimes the shirts are pulled over their heads and sometimes certain dancers are in different stages of wearing the shirts at different times.

Milner is optimistic about the final product but said the shirts have sometimes proved to be a challenge.

“We have to figure out how to use them but also see with shirts over our heads – how you can take them off and put them on,” Milner said. “It looks cool with so many people on stage.”

Mannings said she also found that the shirts could be obstacles at times.

“The most challenging thing is seeing through the shirts on stage,” Mannings said. “It’s hiding behind something. It’s knowing when you’re supposed to go, and knowing the timing and knowing the dance so well you can pretty much do it with your eyes closed.”

While the meaning behind the dance is mostly left to the interpretation of the audience, Milner did have a theme in mind when choreographing.

“There isn’t really a story,” Milner said. “I just like the idea of all these women’s personalities being covered and uncovered.”

Madison Fendley, a sophomore majoring in dance and political science, is performing in “Dance Alabama!” for a second year, but this is the first time she is part of the opening number of the show.

“It’s definitely a new feeling,” Fendley said. “I think I’ll be a little more nervous because usually I’ll be back stage, scoping it out and talking to other dancers. But being in the first dance you don’t get to know anything – when the curtain opens, you’re there. It kind of sets the mood for the whole show.”

Fendley also explained that working with a large number of dancers for this dance has proved to be a new experience for her.

“All the ‘Dance Alabama!’ pieces I’ve been in so far have been about five or six people, so it’s very different working with such a large group,” Fendley said. “But at the same time it’s 15 different ideas and 15 different dancers which at the end of the day is so rewarding, even though it is a challenge.”

