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Marlboro College students Kelly Hayes and Lisa Natoli perform "Nightfall" from the "Roman Sketches" in the dance studio at the school on Thursday. Jason R. Henske/Reformer

Smoke and mirrors in Marlboro

By BOB AUDETTE
Reformer Staff

MARLBORO
Telling this artist her act is nothing but smoke and mirrors is actually a compliment. Spectators lucky enough to get a ticket to an informal dance presentation at Marlboro College on Sunday will get to see for themselves how reflective surfaces, light and flowing silk can be combined to create a unique experience for dancers and audiences alike.

The demonstration is a result of Vermont Performance Lab's first residency at Marlboro College. The lab, founded by David Snyder and Sara Coffey after they moved to the area from New York City in 2004, is designed to "connect art-making with audiences of different kinds," said Coffey.

"It's really to provide artists working in dance and music with space and an opportunity to create new work," she said.

For the lab's first artist-in-residence, Jody

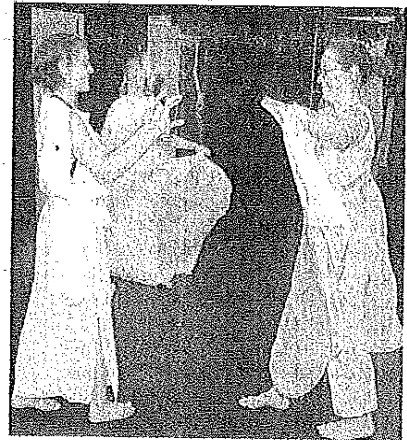
Sperling, the 10-day residency is just what she needed to prepare the dance performance planned for Sunday.

"This is a piece I have had in my head for over a year," said Sperling. "The residency has given me the opportunity to actualize this vision."

Sperling, working with her lighting designer, David Ferri, and two dancers, has assembled a performance based on the art of Loie Fuller, an American dancer who enthralled audiences from the 1890s to the 1920s with elaborate performances utilizing silk garments and innovative lighting. The presentation on Sunday is called Roman Sketches, combining Sperling's choreography and Ferri's light work with the piano music of Charles Griffes, who wrote music during Fuller's heyday.

"Fuller used mirrors in one of her pieces and used light from below," said Sperling. "I

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Jason R. Henske/Reformer
Marlboro College students Lisa Natoli and Kelly Hayes work with choreographer Jody Sperling at the school on Thursday.



Jason R. Henske/Reformer

Choreographer Jody Sperling demonstrates a dance move to Marlboro College student Kelly Hayes on Wednesday.

Dance

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wanted to use those two devices to create a new work. The concept is to have a setpiece of movable mirrors, with an idea to multiply and refract, to parse out the visible spectacle. With the Roman Sketches, the lighting design is part of the initial conception of the piece to become a synthesis of visual design, movement and music. To be able to be that focused and have everybody in the same place, eating and thinking together, is wonderful."

For the students participating in the lab, it's

a unique opportunity to see how professionals create a performance piece.

"To light dance, it's different from lighting a theater," said Kat Williams, a senior who grew up in Marlboro. "Lighting dance is more about the shape of the dance. The individual dancer is less important than their movements through space."

Chris Gabriel, a student stage manager, said he is learning "all sorts of stuff" from Sperling and Ferri.

"Learning about the lighting and seeing how people work together is immensely helpful," said the Connecticut native, who hopes to use

his skills in New York City after he graduates.

Coffey said the lab, which is not directly related to Marlboro College, gives students an opportunity to work with professionals.

"The college doesn't always have the opportunity to have professional artists visit," she said.

Eventually, said Sperling, she would like to present Roman Sketches to audiences in New York City and farther.

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