Announcer: The Missouri State Journal, a weekly program keeping you in touch with Missouri State University.

Emily Yeap: This March, dance will take center stage at Missouri State University. The university's Theatre and Dance Department will host the annual American College Dance Association (ACDA) Central Region Conference March 13th through 16th. This year's theme is “Looking Back, Moving Forward” to honor the 100th anniversary of several dance artists. I'm Emily Yeap.

Joining me today to share more about the conference is Ruth Barnes, conference coordinator and professor of dance at Missouri State.

Ruth Barnes: ACDA stands for the American College Dance Association. This is a national organization. Their mission is to promote dance as an art form in higher education. The organization divides the country into what is now 13 regions. We are a member institution in the central region. Every spring, each region has a regional conference that includes classes that the teachers from the institutions teach. There are concerts. There are two kinds of concerts. One is called an informal concert, and the other is an adjudication concert. For the adjudication concert, there are three nationally or internationally recognized dance artists who come watch the work that is presented. The work could be by students, by faculty, by guests artists. Then the adjudicators give feedback on the work that they see.

Emily Yeap: One highlight of the conference is a tribute to dance luminaries born in 1919, specifically Pearl Primus and Merce Cunningham.

Ruth Barnes: 2019 is the 100th year anniversary of the birth of a number of dance luminaries, some of which who really impacted the field greatly. Among this cluster, we selected Merce Cunningham and Pearl Primus. The conference theme, that is, “Looking Back, Moving Forward,” it's about legacy and the future. The idea of moving forward, we have a third guest who is Cara Hagan, who's the founder of Movies by Movers. This is dance videos that are made by dancers. We have these special workshops. One student from each of the participating schools coming to the conference will participate in each of the workshops, as they choose. Then the last day of the conference, there will be a showing of the work of Cunningham, of something that's related to the work of Primus, and whatever the students create through this Movies by Movers workshop.

For the Primus workshop, we've invited two dancers who worked with a company in New York that's called Urban Bush Women. They made a piece 10 years ago that's called Walking with Pearl, which is about her work, her writing and her life. Primus was both a choreographer-dancer and an anthropologist. She was born in Trinidad, raised in New York City. Her second husband was also Trinidadian. They formed a company back in New York City that was all about Afro-Caribbean dance and music.

Cunningham's work is very, very different. This is a very diverse focus for us. Cunningham is known for the separation of dance and music as art forms, but presented on stage simultaneously, so dance and music relating only in the audience's reception of them, and also what's called non-linear dance.

Emily Yeap: The presentation of the guest artists’ workshops will take place at noon, March 16th, in the Coger Theatre. Later that day, at 7 p.m., the conference will conclude with a gala performance. It will feature select pieces that were presented during the conference. Both events are free and open to the public on a first-come, first-served basis.

Barnes believes hosting the conference is an invaluable opportunity.

Ruth Barnes: I think that people who are in Springfield know that there is very little opportunity to see concert dance. This is a way for our students, anybody in the public who is interested, to see a range of dance, and also to hear from three people who have been in the field various amounts of time. There's a young choreographer, there's someone who just retired from teaching at the Tisch School of the Arts at NYU, and then the dean of the dance part of the Berkeley School of Music. They have a different range and different interests, and so you hear three different opinions from people you don't know.

Emily Yeap: To get more details, visit regonline.com/central19. I'm Emily Yeap for the Missouri State Journal.

Announcer: For more information, contact the Office of University Communications at 417-836-6397. The Missouri State Journal is available online at KSMU.org.