“A main image I give the dancers is a whirlpool,” says Paul Besaw, choreographer of ‘Tract.’ All the momentum goes one way. Then they change directions — they have to fight upstream against that momentum for a while, until it shifts.”

With the mesmerizing rhythm of his marimba literally -- physically -- central to the new work “Tract,” D. Thomas Toner, professor and chair of the Department of Music and Dance, adds a dramatic element to a dance program making its way from rehearsal in Southwick Ballroom to performance at the Inner Mongolia University Arts College (IMUAC). This dance was choreographed by Paul Besaw, associate professor of dance, who has been exhaustively rehearsing with four UVM students who are traveling with him and others in a UVM contingent to China.

The trip is part of an ongoing academic educational exchange begun in 2010 between the College of Education and Social Services and IMUAC. While music education students have traveled to Mongolia in past years, this is the first time UVM has brought student dancers along with education majors and faculty, though Inner Mongolian dancers have performed here.

“We’ll get to see their classes and also have a chance to collaborate with Mongolian arts students,” says Besaw, “so this will be great exposure to a very unique part of China.” All of the dancers say they expect learning from their hosts to be the most valuable part of the experience. “I’m really excited to learn their traditional dance,” says senior Erica Raff. “I just went to Bali and learned some of theirs so it’s nice to be getting a taste of the world and dance history.”

Even a quick immersion, Besaw notes, can be inspiring. “What is there to get out of it,” he offers, “that can inform your own creative work?”

Update: the contingent has arrived in China, they report on Twitter. First stop, the Great Wall:
"Hello!" from CESS students and faculty at the Great Wall of China! Next stop, Inner Mongolia.

@uvmvermont @uvmcess
pic.twitter.com/GMNxt0xVWG