

EMERGING ARTISTS WITH AN EAST WASHINGTON VIBE

Stepping is an iconic dance form that was made popular by historically black sororities and fraternities intent on promoting their organizations as they recruited new members and created a public image of group unity. Stepping is a group dance that involves using the body—specifically the feet and hands—to create rhythm and sounds in lieu of music. As a college student at the University of Maryland, Baltimore County, I and my peers viewed step shows as the meeting places for fellowship and entertainment—intent on creating a vibe of energy and good-natured competition between the frats and sorors that few other venues encouraged.

Dazzled by the quick footwork of the men of Alphi Phi Alpha and the ladies of Delta Sigma Theta—to name a few, I became a quick fan of stepping.

Step Afrika! dance troupe, based here in DC, is the only nationally recognized dance troupe that specifically explores the cultural connection between stepping and African culture and presents this dance form in shows across the country. Amid the world recognition and packed houses, Step Afrika! continues to trail blaze as the only national troupe devoted to this art. The group recently added to their roster of five full-time dancers a young dancer who hails from Southeast DC—Delonte Briggs.

Briggs, a recent college graduate, already has an experienced background

in not just stepping but also jazz, modern, ballet and Afrikan dance as well. “My style is very

organic, is very young,” Delonte Briggs tells me as he takes a quick break from his rigorous dance practice schedule to meet with me. Passionate about his art, Delonte speaks almost cosmically as he explains his style and definition of dance. “Dance portrays the image of how you feel,” he pauses pensively as stepping sounds thunder behind him. “[Dance] is a hands-on experience.” At 22 years-old Briggs has already gone far in the dance world, having traveled cross-country and as far as Africa for shows. He credits his mother with pushing him past his boundaries.

“Although I lived in Southeast for thirteen years of my life, my mother kept me in something all of the time that kept me off of the streets. I ended up at School Without Walls.” At the impressive public magnet school, Briggs participated in the after-school theatre program with City at Peace, a program led by Sandy Holloway, a graduate of Duke Ellington School for the Arts and a noted

choreographer. With Holloway, Briggs nurtured a love for performing. He strengthened his skill in all types of dance genres but grew a strong fondness above all for hip-hop and African dance. With Step Afrika, Briggs became able to indulge in his passion for dance every night he performs.

Growing up on Benning Road in Southeast, Briggs moved to Northwest near the Step Afrika! studio but admits to having an unbreakable kinship with his Southeast roots. “I feel a connection to that whole east of the river side,” he says. He would like to see more people from his old neighborhood step outside of their comfort zone and check out the Step Afrika! show. He believes the show is an entertaining way to learn about the cultural roots of stepping and the civil rights struggles of black people throughout the world.

“[The show] is a reflection of culture, it shows the relation between stepping and the South African gumboot dance and then takes you to the Zulu people, the people of Chaka the Zulu, who do the dance called ndalmo.” From there, Briggs explains you are then taken on a journey that explores the relation between contemporary and traditional forms of stepping that brings us to popular versions like those seen on college campuses practiced by black sororities and fraternities.

Delonte Briggs and the Step Afrika! dance troupe performed at the GALA Theatre-Tivoli May 31 -June 4. Visit their website at www.stepafrika.com for more information about upcoming performances. ■

T HE CAN A SISTA ROCK A MIC? FESTIVAL A VISION MADE INTO REALITY

“Just because we know about the talent that is here [in DC] doesn't mean that the majority does. We want to overcome the 'underground' stigma attached to the live music scene which contains great music that more of the masses would love if given the opportunity [to hear],” says Brandon Felton. Felton, a promoter and events manager with the solSource Group believes that this year's Can A Sista Rock A Mic festival will



definitely give the masses this much-needed opportunity. Kimani Anku, the mastermind of the festival, hopes that the prediction is a true one.

Anku, of Kimani Anku Productions (KAP), is well-known around the area in circles that are familiar with hot DC based neo-soul songstress Afi and the all-female floating showcase series known as the B-Girl Manifesto. Created in 2000, the B-Girl Manifesto was used as a launch pad for Afi who is managed by Anku and other female artists in the DC area who had limited performing opportunities in a city that tended to pigeon-hole artists in one of two genres—go-go or punk music. If you didn't fall into one of the two, gigging was pretty hard.

“The showcase was created to give on-the-verge female artists a platform to speak their minds, free their souls, be seen and be heard,” Anku shares.

He purposely sought out female singers, spoken-word artists and rappers to include in his shows which were featured at the popular talent showcase on the Waterfront—Art-0-matic—and various club venues throughout DC. Often having Afi as a headlining act because of her growing visibility and fan base, Anku was successful in creating a viable network of DC-based female artists who were providing a different vision of the female artist as often seen on MTV and BET. “It's not all about booty-shaking,” says one B-Girl Manifesto fan.

When in 2004 Anku needed to take a break from the monthly responsibility of putting the shows together, he came up with the idea for an annual event that had the same mission of showcasing unsigned female talent but attempted to reach a broader audience in a one week time period. Putting the monthly B-Girl Manifesto shows on hiatus, the Can A Sista Rock A Mic festival was born. The first festival was held last year and met with overwhelming response. This year through a collaboration with solSource,

**DELONTE BRIGGS
THE YOUNGEST
MEMBER OF
STEP AFRIKA!**

BY KHADIJAH ALI-COLEMAN



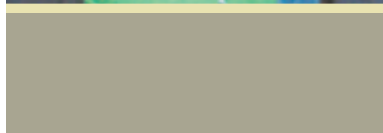
Anku hopes to embark on the same mission of bringing quality music to the masses.

Each day of the seven-day festival, different acts will perform in a different location within the city. The festival will kick off on June 12 with an opening night extravaganza of female DJs mixing during a meet and greet mixer. Following nights will include female rappers, spoken word artists and singers performing while the artwork of local female visual artists will be displayed. Southeast native and r & b singer Green Tea will be featured during the festival as well as international recording artist Julie Dexter and spoken word artist Naima Jahmaal.

"For me, performing at the Can A Sista Rock A Mic? festival is an open affirmation that women can participate in the aggressive culture of hip hop without sacrificing their identity as women and without buying the pre-cut images of the female emcee in the mainstream industry," says Jahmaal. "This festival is truly a celebration of progress without compromise."

For more information on the Can A Sista Rock a Mic? Festival, check out the website at www.bgirlmanifesto.com or www.myspace.com/canasistarockamic. Kimani Anku can also be reached at 240.620.4253 if you are interested in vending during this event or participating. ■

Khadijah Ali-Coleman is a writer, youth worker and performer who lives in the Washington DC metro area with her daughter. She can be reached at sooryouthaspire@yahoo.com if you have a story idea you would like featured in this column.



WHY SHOULD YOUR CHILD BE ENROLLED AT ABC PUBLIC CHARTER IN THE FALL 2006?

You Decide....

ABC PROS:

- ⚙️ MY CHILD WILL GRADUATE AN ADEPT LEARNER
- ⚙️ MY CHILD WILL BE BILINGUAL PROFICIENT
- ⚙️ MY CHILD WILL BE A COMMUNITY LEADER
- ⚙️ MY CHILD WILL IMPROVE ACADEMICALLY

ABC CONS: WHAT CONS?

WHAT'S NEXT? REGISTER NOW!

Academia

Bilingüe de la

Comunidad

Bilingual Community Academy
Public Charter School

ENROLLING 6TH & 7TH GRADE

"OVERALL, ABC IS AN ENTHUSIASTIC, HIGHLY MOTIVATED SCHOOL WITH AMBITIOUS GOALS AND RESOURCES TO ACCOMPLISH THEIR MISSION AND VISION." DC PUBLIC CHARTER SCHOOL BOARD

ACADEMIA BILLINGUE DE LA COMUNIDAD PCS
1501 COLUMBIA RD * 202.822.6301 * WWW.ABCPCS.ORG

Ginkgo Gardens

It's all here at Ginkgo Gardens ... perennials, gorgeous flowering annuals, garden statuary and ornamentation, garden tools, aquatic plants and supplies, trees and shrubs, soils and mulches, and so much more.

911 11th Street, SE
202.543.5172
Hours:
Mon-Fri 8am-7pm
Sat 8am-6pm
Sun 9am-5pm

ginkgogardens.com

DIG IT!