

Teaching culture through dance Haywood makes a difference at PSH

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Spring semester at Penn State Harrisburg has been host to many cultural events provided to the students and the public by the Office of Campus Life and Intercultural Affairs. One such event occurred on March 5 when Penn State Harrisburg students and the local public were entertained by The Habiba Dance Ensemble from Philadelphia. The Dance Ensemble is comprised of five dancers, including the dance studio's namesake and owner, Habiba. The other dancers are Lesley Ashmore, Helen Driggs, Angela Miller and Jennifer Brank.

Habiba Dance Studio was founded in 1983, with a mission, according to the studio's handout, of preserving "traditional Middle Eastern dance forms and to present interpretive works set to Middle Eastern music." Habiba Dance Ensemble's performance on March 5 focused on Egyptian and Tunisian folkloric dances. These dances, as Habiba explained, are traditionally performed at celebrations such as weddings and birthday parties, as well as to celebrate daily life. Themes for folkloric dance are very simple, said Habiba, and can include water gathering and flirtation. Habiba Dance Ensemble performed all folkloric dances, as opposed to the more formal style of court dances that are used by the elite and noble.

Habiba began the performance with an explanation of what their dances mean and how dancing in Middle Eastern cultures differs from Western culture. Habiba said that in Middle Eastern dance the emphasis is on movements of the torso with little foot movement. Dances tended to be done in small spaces, so there was minimal room to move about the floor, requiring the dance to focus more on arm and hip movements.

This differs greatly from Western dance that we are accustomed to in the United States.

Habiba explained that their style of dance is belly dancing, which is used throughout The Middle East, but characteristics of belly dancing vary by region. Habiba used the example of Iranian belly dancing versus Egyptian belly dancing. Both are considered styles of belly dancing, but because the dance is being used in different regions, there will be distinctive characteristics for each area. She likened the belly dancing style of The Middle East to any style of dance that Americans have ingrained in them. It is their everyday style of dancing and involves improvisation just as everyday American dance does.

Habiba Dance Ensemble performed five distinctive folkloric dances, each requiring different elaborate costumes, jewelry and even props in some cases. All were important to the story and theme of the dance and specific to the type of dance being performed. Props included water-carrying jugs for a dance called Balass Dance, or Nile River Dance, that told a story of women from the Egyptian countryside going to the Nile to fill their water jug, called a balass. Another dance that involved props was Habiba's first dance, in which she balanced a clay pot on her head for the Tunisian Pot Dance, Raks al Juzur. This dance is performed to celebrate pottery, the main industry of the islands off the East coast of Tunisia. The other dances were Egyptian and told stories as well. One such story was danced to a Middle Eastern rap song.

This dance was called Amouna and told the story of a young man who defied his parents by falling in love with a woman that they had not chosen for him.

Habiba encouraged the audience to behave as a Middle Eastern audience would by participating with clapping and yelling out "Aiwa" in excitement

when we saw something onstage that we liked. Habiba explained that Aiwa is a colloquial Arabic word for "yes," which means it is the less formal version of the word.

The Ensemble ended their performance with a medley of dances in the style from Upper Egypt which geographically is Southern Egypt. Habiba gave us a lesson in Egyptian geography by explaining that Southern Egypt is known as Upper Egypt because of the way the Nile River flows. These dance styles included the Saidi Raks al Assaya, the Cane Dance, which was performed by women to mock the men who practiced the macho martial arts genre of tatiyb. The second dance of the medley was the Ghawazi, an Egyptian gypsy dance performed by traditional rural female entertainers. The dancers used metal castanets in this dance.

To close out the show, Habiba and her dance ensemble invited the audience to learn how to do the basic steps of Middle Eastern dancing, the style that would be used in social settings. While breaking down the steps, Habiba explained more about Middle Eastern dance in general. She said, "Improvisation is a big part of the dances," and dancers will do their own personal interpretations with their bodies, using little foot movement and many hip movements. Habiba answered any questions the audience had, but her explanations of the culture and their dances throughout the performance were so informative that there was little need for questions other than those of curiosity.

Habiba Dance Ensemble provided Penn State Harrisburg with yet another look at a cultural performance. Be on the lookout for the many more scheduled performances sponsored by Campus Life and Intercultural Affairs. For more information on Habiba Dance Studio, visit their website at www.habibastudio.com

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on a trolley ride in the outskirts of Philadelphia, commenting on the houses and how nice they looked with perfectly manicured lawns. "She had given us hope outside of the box we had been placed in economically. We worked hard and now we each have our own house with grass," she said.

These experiences helped Dr. Brown-Haywood to grow and meet challenges. She is an advocate for eliminating racism and empowering women. She uses every outlet available to her in order to accomplish this daunting goal.

If she had to choose her favorite achievement, it would be receiving the Dr. James Robinson Equal Opportunity Award. "That's the way we should live," she stated. The award is sponsored by the Penn State Alumni Association and recognizes someone who promotes equal opportunity through affirmative action and cross-cultural communication.

Dr. Felicia Brown-Haywood was most recently recognized for her outstanding service and accomplishments on Friday, March 2 2007 at the annual Heritage Breakfast.

The breakfast was hosted at the Harrisburg Hilton and was produced by The Urban Connection of the Capital Region and Cornish & Associates. According to the Cornish & Associates website, "Women chosen to receive the Heritage Award exemplify the philosophy of the Heritage Breakfast. They epitomize African American

Women in government, business, education, health and the arts that have a relentless faith in their ability to succeed."

group of people. Dr. Brown-Haywood was well deserving of the award. She is extremely active in the community



Photo by **MARIN BENDORITIS/Capital Times**

Someone from the city of Harrisburg nominated Dr. Brown-Haywood anonymously for the award. She is involved with service regarding women and domestic violence, sitting on the board of the WYCA, whose goal is to empower women and eliminate racism.

Although the nomination came as a shock of Brown-Haywood, she is not foreign to the award, having sung at the 2006 ceremony.

She received not only the honor of being a Heritage Award winner, but also gifts from sponsor companies; such as a gift card to the Hershey Spa and tickets to a Bears game.

In attendance were leaders from major corporations in the area, such as Hershey Co. and Giant Foods. This allowed business leaders and educators to network and build business relationships with a diverse

and around Penn State Harrisburg. She started here in 1987 as a graduate student and was then hired as a staff counselor. She moved to Gettysburg College in 1990 as the Assistant Dean, but came back to Harrisburg in 1991 to the position she holds now, Director of Student Affairs.

She states that the students are the favorite part of her job here. "The most rewarding aspect is seeing the students and seeing them grow, and the friendships we develop of every race and ethnicity," she said.

Even for a woman who has achieved so much, she is still very humble. She is always striving to do more for the community and her students.

"I appreciate the students coming out and supporting me. It was an overwhelming feeling of joy to have the students there," said Brown-Haywood.

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