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Dance and Awareness

Forces of Nature Dance Theatre's Vision

by Julia Traveras



Photo Courtesy of Erin Baiano

Outside St. Martin's church in Harlem, dirty snow and slippery pavements are the rule. However, inside it's a completely different world. The second floor, the studio and office space of Forces of Nature Dance Theatre, is covered with worldly memorabilia: African masks, rugs, drums, and color everywhere.

"I really have things I want to say," says soon to be sixty-year-old choreographer Abdel R. Salaam. Fully engaged in his role as artistic director of the company, his work seeks to go beyond the aesthetics of dance. In an afternoon conversation with the man himself, he expressed being wholeheartedly dedicated to "using dance as an artistic language" to communicate his opinions about social, ecological, political, religious or even scientific topics.

Fighting ignorance, and more so, persistent ignorance is the main motivation for the choreographer. He begins by drawing inspiration from history, religion, nature and mythology. With a mixture of research and movement exploration he creates pieces that are not only aesthetically breathtaking but also stimulate controversy and thought. As he said himself, "you don't have to beat people over the head for your message to get across".

Keeping with this tendency, the company is in the works of presenting on April 9 and 10 for a Haiti Relief Activity in Aaron Davis Hall. The works that will be presented feature Mr. Salaam's new solo work, "Toc Sick" featuring Nathan Trice, a piece that explores the ills of a carbon-based society. There will also be an excerpt from their most recently acclaimed work Eclipse: Visions of the Crescent and the Cross called "A Question of Modesty", which challenges the notion of modesty in Christianity and Islam, followed by "A Personal Choice", a piece that deals with perceptions of sexuality amongst other issues.

Whether it is dancing to converse about nature's destructive or creational powers, or engaging the youth of the community through a Wellness Academy, it seems Forces of Nature won't be "just dancing" for a while.

The company will be performing at Hostos Community College Theater (149 Grand Concourse, Bronx, NY) in celebration of Black History Month on March 3, 2010. For more information about Forces of Nature and about this or any other performance, please visit www.forcesofnature.org.