

features



Photo by Ralph Ward

Opeyos Prepare For Spring Recital

by Laurie Willis
Staff Writer

Only a few weeks before the April 19 spring recital, and everyone in the Opeyo dance group is excited.

The 13 members of the group -- a subdivision of the Black Student Movement -- perform jazz, modern and ballet dances. As they practice hard today, they all have the same goal in mind -- make the recital the best it can be.

The 11 women move with grace and agility -- the bodies flow with music. The men move equally well; it all seems so natural.

This practice in the South Campus Lounge closely resembles most others. The members dance, dance and dance some more. Practice makes perfect, and practice they do.

Other than giving constructive criticism about the dances, few people talk.

As some members get a routine down, others applaud. Someone says "good move" from the side, and someone else looks across the room and says "that's better, but keep trying." The dancers obviously care about each other and perfecting the dance.

In the middle of the floor, Director James Dempson helps four women learn a dance he choreographed.

The women watch Dempson closely.

To the side, several dancers practice various movements while others sit and watch awaiting their turn.

Dempson choreographed this particular dance; he carries them through the dance until he feels they all know it well.

The senior political science major,

and Arnold Alston, a senior biology major, are the only men in the group. They practice in black Danskin tights and gray sweat shirts.

Most of the women wear leotards of various colors, tights and leg warmers. Some dancers practice in tennis shoes, shoes or bare feet.

For some of the dancers, it is their first time dancing in a group. "Because I had no previous dancing experience, I didn't really know what to expect, but I love it," said Dempson who has been with the group for three years.

Men tend to feel that the group shows no masculinity, Dempson and Alston said.

The men have no problems getting around stereotype and enjoy the group a lot, they said.

"The dancing is a way to express myself," said Alston, who has been with the group for two years. "I love to see the body in motion...To me that's art."

Dempson said he looked forward to the Tuesday and Thursday practices because the group was special to him. "Being an Opeyo dancer is like being part of a second family," he said.

Other members share his feelings. Olga Simmons, senior, said although this was her first year with the group, she really considered it a special part of her life.

"The thing I like most about the group is the togetherness we have," she said. "We're not just a group of dancers per se... We've gotten to know each other well, like a family."

Simmons said her only regret was that she was not a member of the group her sophomore and junior years.

"I had seen them perform a while back, and I enjoyed what they were doing," she said. "It looked like a lot of work, but I wanted to try it."

She said the members of the group really cared about each other, and that's important. "If you simply dance with people but don't get to know them, it doesn't have the same positive effect."

She said what one Opeyo dancer does effects all Opeyos. "What we do individually reflects on the whole group," she said. "We all want to look good so we help each other out."

Dancers have to feel what they're doing, Simmons said. She said to truly express something to an audience, the dancers themselves must feel it.

SL: Fine Evening Of Jazz

by Kevin Washington
Assistant Editor

What has a yellow human taxicab, a dazzling tap routine and Freda Payne singing hot Duke Ellington jazz?

Well, if you couldn't answer, you probably didn't buy a ticket and catch the Tony Award winning Broadway-on-Tour musical *Sophisticated Ladies* at Memorial Hall on March 15 and 16.

Headlining the Broadway-on-Tour version of the show is Freda Payne, known more for the R&B/Pop cuts than jazz. But Payne's performance is excellent; she pours her immense talent into the Duke's songs making a few of them her own. She gives the show the 'Umph' factor talent into the Duke's songs making a few of them her own. She gives the show the 'Umph' factor which someone with her reputation should bring.

Payne's best performance comes with the other lead singer, Jodi Marzorati, in *Mood Indigo*. A popular 1931 blues piece sung in the second act, *Mood Indigo* gives the two singers an opportunity to pull off a real show stopper. Marzorati and Payne's voices are made for the blues/jazz music which forms the core of the Duke's repertoire. Their performances point out that Ellington's music is not only to be played by musicians, but sung by musicians as well.

Dan Strayhorn gives the roadshow its best male vocal performance. His mellow voice seems to be the perfect counterpart to Payne's and he plays it for all it's worth in the song *Sophisticated Ladies* late

"The music has a lot to do with what we feel and how we dance," she said.

"We put forth the same amount of energy for each song and dance but at different levels," Simmons said.

She said she was very excited about the recital. "It's going to be really nice, really nice," she said.

Crystal McDaniel another dancer, agreed. "The recital is going to be very good...It will go really well," she said.

McDaniel said she liked the fact that various dancers had choreographed the dances for the recital.

"I like the individual choreography because it adds a lot of diversity to our dances," she said

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in the second act.

But if Duke Ellington's music is given a vocal dimension in *Sophisticated Ladies* (for the first time for many of its listeners), it is also given a dance dimension as well. Tall lithe Lynn Sterling expresses Ellington's smooth, sultry style in *Music Is A Woman* in the first act and keeps pouring on the steam as the revue progresses. To compliment her performance is Bruce Anthony Davis (who could be seen in *All That Jazz*). Davis is like the street dancers hustling the streets of New York for a few dollars -- absolutely fine in every movement, yet with a cocky style of his own.

Tap dancing Roger Spivy is the most memorable dancer, for he alone is responsible for the show's fabulous tap performances. With the show when it originally was on Broadway, Spivy shows that he's used to giving a stellar performance on the top side of his taps while providing the show some variety. Henry Letang, tap choreographer, does a superb job of using Spivy's talents to the fullest.

Because the music forms the backbone of *Sophisticated Ladies*, it needs to be no less than fantastic -- and it is. Although Ellington's orchestra does not play for the show, the musicians are of such high calibre, it doesn't matter.

The costumes for the show also deserve honorable mention. Willa Kim, who won a Tony award for her costume designs in the show an often strange look. Half set-Half costume, her human taxicab in *I'm Just a Lucky So-And-So* is a work of pure genius.



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