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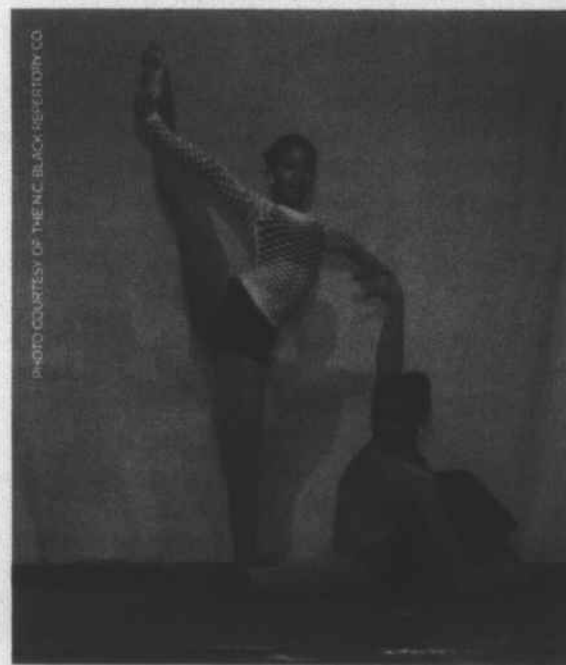
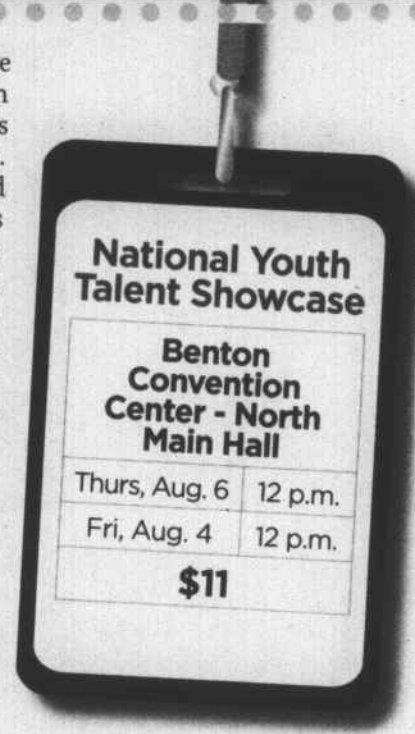
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National Youth Talent Showcase

One of National Black Theatre Festival Founder Larry Leon Hamlin's many legacies is his embracing and fostering of young talent. Introducing young people to – and indoctrinating them into – the richness and beauty of black theatre was a mission he pursued throughout his life. His N.C. Black Repertory Co. regularly staged special performances for schools and youth groups; he saw through the creation of the Black Rep's Teen Ensemble before his death in 2007; and he planted the seeds of the National Youth Talent Showcase, a permanent component of the NBTF that gives up-and-coming performers the chance to be judged by notables and shine before a crowd of hundreds.

Tomorrow's stars are gearing up for this year's showcase, which is being coordinated by Dr. Stephanie "Asabi" Howard, a noted director, actress and N.C. Central University professor. A nationwide call for talent went out several months ago. Would-be participants had to submit a videotaped snippet of them singing, dancing, acting, reciting poetry or entertaining in some other form. The best and brightest will be invited to compete during a two-day showcase. Celebrity judges will critique the performers after they do their thing before what is typically a packed house.

The family friendly event has grown in popularity, thanks, in part, to the high level of talent. Standing ovations are frequent, and many alumni of the Showcase have gone on to acclaim, including Alyssa White, who has been featured on Best of the Best show on "Showtime at the Apollo," and Qaasim Middleton, who had a stellar run on the last season of "American Idol." ■



Young dancers perform at the 2009 festival.