

Kenna Sarge & Voice of Culture: Reclaiming, reviving tradition

Written by Alaina L. Lewis

Voice of Culture, a new dance company founded by dance instructor Kenna Sarge, is in the makings of bringing our traditions and roots back to the world of dance as it prepares the Twin Cities for its artistic awakening. Sarge, a trained instructor and a true mother of culture, hosts V.O.C, a youth percussionist dance group, that's theme is centered on exposing West African Dance and traditional drumming.

In existence for only a few months, but already shaping up to survive it's promising journey, V.O.C. does more than just entertain it's audience with a simple hip sway or the beat of a drum, rather it shares the fruits of our beginnings through the message within each movement. The company was born from a vision to produce works that reflect and teach the traditions of African dance that have been hiding within our current African American culture. It's a way to share the inner workings of our cultural ancestry and examine our roots before we bridged a divide.

Right now, during its introductory stages, the members of the company are involved in a step by step training process that does more than just simply require memorizing moves and passing around a drum. V.O.C. dancers are trained to recognize the origins of a dance, the meaning of a beat, and the art of reproducing our stories that are told through movement. Highlighting the importance of expressing the West African tradition of rhythmic communication, her artists are trained to express different moments of celebration from the of a birth of a child, and on to ones arrival at adulthood, through the customary use of conveying meaningful messages with drum and movement.

Although Sarge is a dance instructor at The St. Paul Conservatory for the Performing Arts, she reserves V.O.C for young people who are more than just interested in learning a new African dance or in search of a new after school program, but rather young artists who are ready to submerge themselves in the awareness and origins of our West African culture. The young protégés get more than just a lesson in dance but also discipline, tradition, and an understanding of their African ancestry. The group receives training from both the hands of Sarge as well as through African dance workshops they are able to attend throughout the city and in the United States. V.O.C has been blessed through all their learning experiences, and are currently preparing for a trip to Oakland, California to attend a dance workshop hosted by Diamano Coura, in an effort to continue perfecting their craft as they prepare to become a permanent fixture within the Twin Cities dance scene.

The young artists can be seen performing West African drum and dance in different cultural events throughout the Twin Cities.

Next up for the group, Sarge will be hosting the upcoming Global Hotdish Variety Show on February 28th at the Minnesota History Center and her company Voice of Culture will be one of the acts performing. Be on the lookout. Website: www.voiceofculture.com.