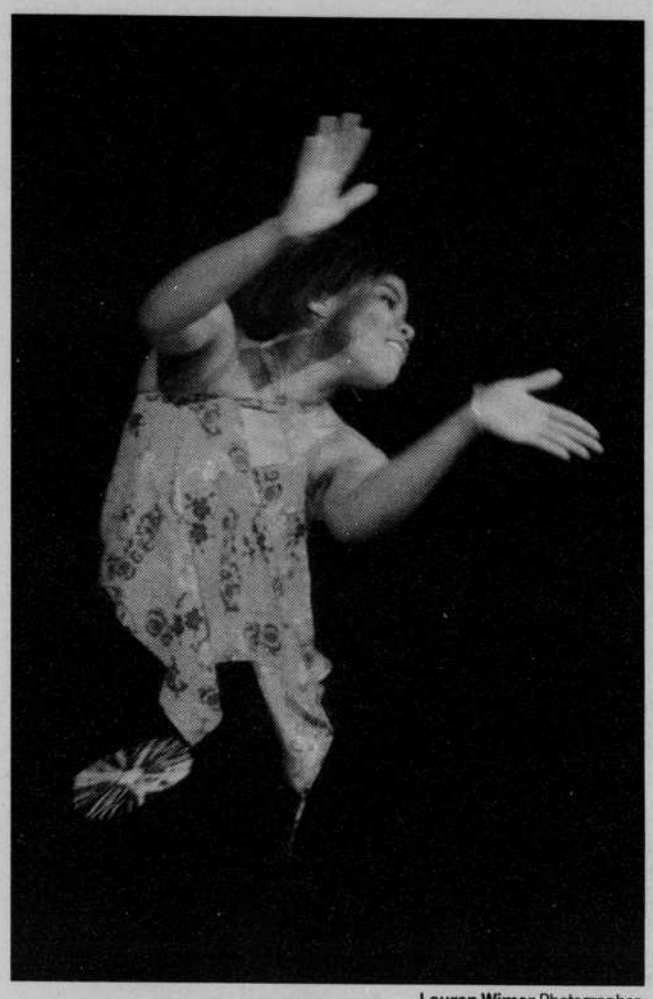
University's first Africa Night welcomes enthusiastic crowd



Lauren Wimer Photographer

Ethnic studies major Inyeza Oni performs at the first-ever African Night, held Friday evening in the EMU Ballroom.

A standing-room-only crowd celebrated African culture at Friday's event

By Jonah Schrogin
Freelance Reporter

A packed EMU Ballroom audience clapped, yelled, cheered and danced in support of the first-ever Africa Night on Friday evening.

The dinner and show, hosted by the African Student Association, was entitled "Soul of the Motherland."

Portland restaurant Horn of Africa catered a traditional African dinner of luuku, or garlic-lemon chicken; biddeena, or Ethiopian bread; and mutabag, or African doughnut.

The performance opened with a fashion show. Two or three people at a time walked in tune with rhythmic music and colorful lights down the middle of the Ballroom, wearing costumes from the country they represented.

The 14 performance pieces included a symbolic West African dance, poetry from Africa, flute playing, belly dancing, and a French rap called "I Got 5 On It" by Da Luniz.

"French rap is way cooler than American rap," freshman Dakota Witt said.

Senior Robert Miller said he liked the Habesha dance even when there were technical difficulties.

"The music went off, and the students on stage started improvising to the claps from the audience," Miller said.

Performers and audience members danced together on stage and celebrated the evening with a unity dance.

"We exceeded expectations (about the audience)," program coordinator Haben Woldu said.

Nearly 100 people had to stand around the perimeter of the room because it was so full. Woldu said ASA had to fundraise and find groups to help pay the $5,000 cost of the show.

Sophomore and performer Deborah Ochieng said the goal of Africa Night was to raise awareness about African culture.

"Africa night is a night whereby different nations from Africa come together to demonstrate and present in a nutshell what the African culture is all about," Ochieng said. "To show the African culture and keep the culture rolling."

Jonah Schrogin is a freelance reporter for the Emerald.

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public sectors provides valuable experience for anyone interested in serving their community. She said while it is not difficult to find people willing to work in the often low-paying field, a lot of turnover exists because of financial and stress-related reasons.

"There are lots of people who want to do this sort of work," she said, adding that some people working for the public, including herself, choose to work in the private sector until they become financially stable and then later return to community work.

She said one of the most rewarding aspects of working in the field is observing the people who receive help.

"I think that seeing the people they serve makes an impression on them for life," she said.

Along with the HIV Alliance, the Lane County Community and Economic Development Program, the Rural Development Initiative and the Oregon Homeless and Runaway Youth Coalition all receive support from students funded through the grant, according to the release.

Byrd said she hopes to stay in the public sector once she completes her degree and plans to work with immigrants and refugees, helping them to find affordable housing and benefit from economic development. After meeting her husband, who is an immigrant, while working for the Peace Corps in Romania four years ago, Byrd said she wants to focus on the international community.

"I have this eye on the international world," she said.

Contact the higher education/student life/student affairs reporter at chelseaduncan@dailyemerald.com.

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