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A different drum



LAUREN WIMER | SENIOR PHOTOGRAPHER

Rehearsing "Facadoba," senior Sayra Craig dances across the stage for Dance Africa, a compilation of African-theme dance and music presented by the dance department.

Dance Africa performs original pieces in honor of Martin Luther King Jr.

BY NATASHA CHILINGERIAN
SENIOR PULSE REPORTER

The Department of Dance will celebrate Martin Luther King Jr.'s birthday on Jan. 14 and 15 with a vibrant performance of African dances and drumbeats. Two Congolese guests will join the 18 dancers and drummers of Dance Africa for a night of African performance art.

While Dance Africa normally holds two small annual performances in the fall and spring, Director Rita Honka said the group will appear in one large show this weekend to celebrate King's birth and begin its Oregon tour earlier than usual in the year. By appearing on two consecutive nights in the Dougherty Dance Theatre, the show will be more accessible for community members.

The group of dancers and

drummers — consisting of University students and a few alumni — has been working on original pieces for the show since fall, but this week guests Mabiba Baegne and Massengo Constant are in town to teach ethnic moves and rhythms that will be included in the performance.

This is the second time Baegne has shared her dancing, choreography, singing and drumming skills in the Department of Dance.

"(Baegne) is joyous and knowledgeable and is an amazing teacher," Honka said. "We usually don't repeat guest artists, but she's worth it."

Dances will represent numerous African countries, including Guinea, South Africa, Togo and Zimbabwe. Dance Africa member Julie Polhemus said a stand-out section in the show is the "Gumboots" session, a South African tradition in which dancers generate music by tapping rhythms on their bodies.

Dance Africa Musical Director Brian West said Constant will stand out at the show by producing a larger,

purser sound than the University's drummers, a result of being surrounded by drumming his whole life.

"That's what we're all shooting for, and it's cool because we have the chance to hear that sound when the guest comes," he said. "We're awed by that."

Following this weekend's performance, the ensemble will take its show on tour to grade schools and venues around Oregon. Polhemus said the grade-school visits provide education and thrills for the children in the audience.

"The students get so excited, you can see it in their faces," she said. "Some schools we visit are doing a unit on Africa, and the show will start off the unit. That gets the kids excited and then they can learn more about the culture."

The Dance Africa concert will begin at 8 p.m.; tickets cost \$10 for general admission and \$5 for students and seniors and are available at the door or by calling 346-3386.

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