

# Step contest unites black greek community

Members of the National Pan-Hellenic Conference took part in the "Ain't No Half Steppin'" competition

BY MATT CHABAN  
DAILY EMERALD FREELANCE REPORTER

A quiet pervades the EMU most Saturdays, its many amenities shuttered as students head off campus to party and study.

But this Saturday the hip-hop that rumbled through the building was drowned out only by the thunder of a stomping and clapping crowd during "Ain't No Half Steppin'," the sixth-annual step competition put on by the members of the Zeta Phi Beta sorority.

Because the University is predominantly white, "black greeks are underrepresented and unnoticed," senior LaTina Lewis said. Lewis planned most of the step competition, a part of her responsibilities as president of Zeta Phi Beta.

The Zetas established the step competition to bring together community members and students from

the nine traditionally black fraternities and sororities, known as the National Pan-Hellenic Conference.

Kaon-Jabbar East, an alumnus of the Kappa Alpha Psi fraternity who now lives in California, read a history of step during the Kappas' performance.

East dated stepping to colonial South African diamond mines, where slaves were robbed of their instruments for fear they might incite an uprising. They then began to use their bodies in place of their drums, clapping, stomping on the ground and pounding their torsos, thighs or heads with their hands.

Melissa Ballard, a University senior and Zeta sister, said the moves originated from black soldiers returning from military service, which is why stepping demands "extreme precision."

"People give widely varying answers to the simple question, when and where did stepping begin?" writes Elizabeth Fine, a Virginia Tech professor, in her book "A History of Stepping." "While many African movement and communication patterns are clearly evident in stepping, the tradition was forged on college campuses in black fraternities and sororities out of the African heritage of speech, song, and dance."

A nearly full EMU Ballroom reflected student and community interest in this heritage.

"It's just about the culture and the excitement of seeing a group of people work together as a team," said junior LaTasha Brown.

Kery White said he drove down from Portland for the show.

"I come every year, and I'm a loyal fan. It's a place to see family and friends, and it gets increasingly better every year," he said.

The show opened with the different greek organizations marching and stepping through the aisles. The first act, a duo from Portland called the Hip-Hop Group, stepped to a medley of contemporary hip-hop tracks.

They were followed by the Kappa Alpha Psi fraternity. After East read the history information, he and three others performed a series of steps with canes that they slammed against the stage and spun into the air.

After an intermission, the Sigma Beta fraternity from Seattle performed a set filled with sexual innuendoes that garnered the most boisterous response from the audience.

"What we're gonna do right here is go back in time. Way back, before all the theatrics," members of the Sigma Gamma Rho sorority said as they took the stage for the final act of the night. But then the disco started blaring, and the Sigmas' joke was revealed as they began to cop moves from "Saturday Night Fever."

During the sorority's routine, 1-year-old Kaylen Lewis squirmed in her mother's lap as she had for much of the show, but not from boredom. She, too, wanted to step. Wriggling free from Shereesa Lucas' arms, Kaylen bobbed and jumped in the aisle, even pounding the floor once or twice. Just like the adults around her, she had a huge smile on her face.



Dalenisha Crabtree of Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority Inc. danced at the sixth-annual Step Show hosted by Zeta Phi Beta. This year's event, "Ain't No Half Steppin'," was held Saturday evening in the EMU Ballroom.

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