

# Arts & ENTERTAINMENT

The Portland Observer

## Award - Winning Jefferson High School Dancers Jazz Tap Their Way Through Essence Of Ellington

Several current members and some recent distinguished graduates from the Jefferson Performing Arts High School are playing a large role in the upcoming Essence of Ellington, a music, dance and video salute to jazz great Duke Ellington premiering at 7:30 PM on Saturday, September 23, 1995 at the Arlene Schnitzer Concert Hall. These outstanding "Elling-teens" have been busy studying rare film clips of the dance sequences in record and concert promotions, movie sequences like the famous "Cabin in the Sky" and Duke's first movie made in the 1930s "Symphony in Black," to correctly imitate the steps of featured dancers like the "Lindy-hop Dancers" in a film called "Cottontail."

These up and coming "Rug-cutters" include Jefferson High School senior Yoji Hall who recently returned to Portland after winning a scholarship to attend the prestigious Alvin Ailey Dance Company Workshop this past August. Two other performers in Essence of Ellington also attended the Alvin Ailey school: Rose Festival Court princess and honors graduate Kahleelah Rahsaan from Northeast Portland, and Kamaria Kyle, who has also preformed with the Northwest African American Ballet Theatre. Kahleelah and Kamaria received scholarships to attend the University of Oregon this fall where they will be studying and dancing.

Other Alvin Ailey Scholarship recipients include Yoji Hall, a senior at Jefferson Performing Arts High School. In addition to studying art, he is equally adept at the martial arts and acting classes. Bunky Hodlan is a member of the Northwest African Ballet Theatre and served this summer as a counselor for the Young Musicians and Artists Summer Workshop in Salem. Taj Hill is a senior at Jefferson High School and a third year Jefferson Dancer and second year member of the Northwest African American Ballet.

Two other dancers performing in Essence of Ellington are recent graduates from

Jefferson high School. Ron Smith began dancing in the Dalles, and continued his training as a Jefferson Dancer. While still a student at Jefferson, he received the highly coveted scholarship for Arts Recognition and Talent Search. After a stint dancing and teaching in Italy, Switzerland, Austria and Germany, he

is now a co-owner and principal instructor at the Oregon Dance Academy. Jimi Renfro has recently returned from a four year stint in Italy where he choreographed, danced and acted in Italian productions, opera companies and television. Mr. Renfro is currently on the dance faculty at Jefferson High School.

Essence of Ellington is a music, dance and film tribute to jazz legend Duke Ellington, as narrated by his son, Mercer Ellington. The West Coast premiere of a collection of rare film clips and performance outtakes of the Duke in concert, this event will feature top jazz performers like Ron Steen and his friends.

The colorful dance sequences will be performed by the Jefferson Dancers, Terry Brock, and Gracey Tune. Essence of Ellington is a fundraiser for student scholarships for the Black Studies Department at Portland State University and for youth jazz music scholarships from the Jazz Society of Oregon.



Photo courtesy of On Broadway. From left: Shirley Nantette, Akbar DePriest, Mel Brown, Dennis Springer, Tona Webb, center: Steve Jones

**Join us at the "Essence of Ellington" on Saturday, September 23**  
 Arlene Schnitzer Concert Hall 7:30 pm  
 An Evening of Rare Film Clips, the Jefferson Dancers, and two All-Star Jazz Bands  
 Narrated by Mercer Ellington  
 Tickets: Ticketmaster (224-4400) or PCPA Box Office General \$20/Student \$10  
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## The Gap Band

The Gap Band was scheduled to play the lotus Card Room, Sunday Evening, weather permitting. Well, the weather didn't exactly permit it, but what's a little rain, a little thunder, a little lightening, to a Portlander, right? The show went on anyway, and The Gap Band played to an impressive crowd. They had 'em lined up down the block, waiting for the chance to be a part of history, part of a Gap Band Audience.

A disco dance, featuring seventies music, opened for the main event, so, when the time came, the crowd was warmed up, if a little wet. The clock struck 10:00, and the drummer counted 1,2,3,4, and it was on. The opening number, mainly a iRap thang, was on hit. Then, all of a sudden, there was a face in the crowd, a face with a familiar Gap toothed smile, the iface of Charlie?, the lead singer,

shaking hands as he walked to the front. He mounted the stage, and it was on all over iagain. They had come to drop a bomb on Portland, and that's iexactly what they did, moving with ease thru a songlist that isounded like "The Gap Band's Greatest Hits; songs like "Early in The Morning, You Dropped a Bomb On Me, Candy, and iOutstanding", were dropped on the usually sedate Portland icrowd, as the thundering rhythm section whipped the crowd into ia musical frenzy. That would have been enough, but NO—. They ifollowed up with a repatuore of Sly Stones Greatest hits. iPortlands on Andy Stokes, was in the mix, lending a local iflavor to the scene, but there was no doubt of it being a Gap iBand Affair.

Altho the concert was a benefit for M.D.A., the presence of what

appeared to be Black Muslim body guards, and the iconstant references to the upcoming men's march on Washington, ithat will be lead by Louis Farrakann, made me wonder who the ievent was actually benefiting.

In any case, this concert, one of a number of big name italent concerts put on yearly by the lotus card room, was ienjoyed by all who were privileged to make an appearance. It iwas, in the words of a Gap band song "Outstanding".

I don't know about ya'll, but I personally believe that we icould use a few more acts like The Gap Band in Portland. What iabout you? Write the Portland Observer, and let us know how iyou feel, and keep reading for news of up coming events. REMEMBER, YOU HEARD IT HERE FIRST!!

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