

Polk State Artist-in-Residence Gives Master Class at Harrison, Encourages Students to Learn History of Dance

Posted on Thursday, February 26, 2015 by Polk Newsroom



Choreographer and dancer Camille A. Brown, front center, spent Wednesday afternoon giving a master class at Harrison School for the Arts. Mora-Amina Parker, back row far left, a dancer in Brown's company, also participated in a question-and-answer session with the students.

Thanks to Polk State College, aspiring dancers at Lakeland's **Harrison School for the Arts** spent Wednesday afternoon learning from a professional.

All week, the Polk State Lake Wales Arts Center is hosting **Camille A. Brown**, a New York-based choreographer and dancer whose credits include the **Bessie Award** and two **Princess Grace Awards**. During her busy visit to the College, Brown is teaching master classes to students at the Florida Dance Theatre, Bok

Academy, Hillcrest Academy and Lake Wales High School.

Brown, who studied at the University of North Carolina School of the Arts, led the Harrison students through a series of exercises intended to teach them about the evolution of social dances.

The steps that are popular in today's music videos are no accident, Brown explained; they are derived from dances that people were dancing decades ago.

Dances like the buck, wing and jig, became the kid n' play, the mashed potato, the running man, the snake.

Not only is it important to know about the history of various dance steps, it's also important to understand African-American contributions to the art form, Brown explained.

"A lot of times, we're only told part of the story," she said.

In her own dance education, Brown learned far more about France's King Louis XIV than about African-American tap dancer William Henry Lane, even though both made long-lasting impacts.

"We need to get all sides of the story," she said.

When she wasn't teaching about the history of dance, Brown was encouraging the students to be themselves:

"Make pretend this is something you're selling to me," she said, coaxing more emotion out of the students.

"Who were you before you came to this space? We think we have to leave ourselves when we enter the dance space. Relax. Be yourself," she urged.

After two hours on their feet, the students gathered around Brown and one of the dancers from her company, Mora-Amina Parker, for a question-answer session.

The students' teacher, Shelley Bourgeois, described the afternoon as invaluable.

"With every artist we bring in, our students learn about how they've made it in the dance world. It teaches our students about how they can make it in the dance world, too," she said.

Earlier in the week, Brown participated in a discussion on art and its response to social issues. The discussion, moderated by Professor's Derek Menchan and Orathai Northern, took place at Polk State Lakeland.

Brown's visit to the College culminates with performances of the first acts of her award-winning shows, "Black Girl" and "Mr. Tol E. RAnCE."

Accessed on February 27, 2015 at 3:41pm from <https://www.polk.edu/news/polk-state-artist-in-residence-gives-master-class-at-harrison-encourages-students-to-learn-history-of-dance/>