Jahari Spring Production: “Peaceful {R} Evolution”

Spring semester has been full of excitement for the Jahari Dance Troupe. They had the unique opportunity to perform at the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in Cleveland, Ohio as part of the BCC Soul of Cleveland Tour on March 5, 2016. During the tour participants visited the Louis Stokes Museum and were greeted by scholar Cornel West at lunch.

The last few weeks of Spring semester at the Black Cultural Center means that ensemble spring productions are in full force. The remaining April production is “Peaceful {R} Evolution,” featuring the Jahari Dance Troupe. It takes place on Saturday, April 23, 2016, 7:00 p.m. at Loeb Playhouse. The primary inspiration for the title of the show was the fall research tour to Selma and Montgomery, Alabama. Ensemble members desired that the show focus on non-violent protests, revolutions and revolutionaries throughout history to reflect what participants learned during the fall research tour. The show’s choreographer, Joshua Ishmon, desired to give student choreographers the opportunity to let their imagination run free inside of a more structured format than usual.

Jahari has been working diligently on the upcoming production. Ensemble members choreographed a variety of dances for the production and are very excited to present their work. Sabrina Allen, Jahari student coordinator, shares that “as ensemble members choreograph their pieces they have the opportunity to educate themselves and others through visual and physical language. We would like for the audience to take away knowledge of history that they may or may not be privy to and also to garner more insight on protests and revolutions that are not frequently mentioned.”

For those interested in attending the production tickets are: $5 Purdue Students, $7 General Public.

Juanita Crider, Editor
Midwest Bisexual, Lesbian, Gay, Transgender, Ally College Conference

Purdue University had the honor to host the 2016 Midwest Bisexual, Lesbian, Gay, Transgender, Ally College Conference February 19-21, 2016 (MBLGTACC). Over 2000 students, faculty, and community members from all over the Midwest were in attendance. MBLGTACC is a conference held for students and faculty put on by students and faculty. This year there were numerous workshops held by students and staff from various universities that discussed different intersectional, LGBTQ+ topics in order to bring awareness and concern toward these topics.

“I had a really good experience,” said Jessica Vohlin, a sophomore in International Agronomy and Women, Gender, and Sexuality Studies. “It’s cool to know the other things happening at other schools, like one school just got an LGBT center so it was cool to tell them about our center and share ideas.”

MBLGTACC was held at Purdue this year, and many students were the driving force behind putting on this conference for the benefit of Midwestern LGBTQ+ people and allies. Jennifer Martinez, a junior in Finance and Consulting, was the Director of Volunteers and Assistant Director of Finance. Martinez said, “MBLGTACC is so much more than simply bringing together students that align themselves with an LGBTQIA identity. At its core, it is about providing a safe and welcoming environment where attendees can feel free to engage in conversations which can inspire, spark critical thinking, educate and bring together intelligent, diverse individuals from across the country.”

Many students expressed their gratitude to the conference, and also provided ways to have the next conference improve as well. One aspect that many attendees liked were the gender neutral bathrooms found on the second floor of Stewart Center, and of course many like the drag show, Todrick Hall, and Judy Shepherd as guest speaker.

“Judy Shepherd is an inspirational figure,” said Ralen Ricardo, a freshman in Communication. “I had seen the documentary [Matt Shepherd is a Friend of Mine] so it was cool to see her in person. She was really open to answer questions, and she conveyed some really amazing messages.”

MBLGTACC is more than a college conference, which is supported by the numerous tweets found on twitter that say the attendees wish the conference could last forever, followed by the hash tag #MBLGTACC2016.

Martinez continued to say, “It was beautiful to see and be a part of all the growth that took place, not only within our team, but during the conference itself with our attendees. The transformation was phenomenal, and I am humbled by the opportunity to have been able to be a part of such a meaningful event.”

Kathrine Boyer, staff writer

INSIDE THIS ISSUE

Page 2 Midwest Bisexual, Lesbian, Gay, Transgender, Ally College Conference
Page 3 Gordon Parks Fine Arts Ensemble
Page 4 Graduates
Page 5 Graduates
Page 6 Graduates
Page 7 Graduates
Page 8 And Finally
Introducing Sonita Surratt
The New Directional Players
Artist-In-Residence

At the beginning of spring semester the Black Cultural Center welcomed Sonita Surratt as the Artist-In-Residence for the New Directional Players (NDP). She comes to us from Chicago, Illinois where she serves as faculty in the theatre Department at Columbia College. She brings an extensive background of experience to the BCC; as an actress, vocal, speech, movement and acting professional in her faculty appointment and also in the community. Surratt holds a Bachelor of Arts in vocal performance from SUNY, Genesco, N. Y. and a Master of Fine Arts in drama from Syracuse University. Below is an interview.

Crider: Why did you apply for the position of Artist-In-Residence for The New Directional Players?
Surratt: I think the question is how could I not apply? At a glance, a 4-hour round trip weekly was unappealing. That thought was usurped though when my research revealed that it is all the things I love: history, theatre, engagement and, not to the exclusion of others, focusing primarily on my people (of the African/African American Diaspora). If I wasn’t hooked before my visit, the BCC tour cinched it. The next day, even before I got home that night actually, I phoned family and friends and told them excitedly “if they like me, I’m in; I like them.”

Crider: Can you share a bit about your background as it relates to theater?
Surratt: I come from a family of teachers and performing artists. My grandmother was a costume designer and, I grew up in awe of the powerful voices of aunts, uncles and cousins. I didn’t know I could (really) sing and act (until recognized with honors and awards); I just knew I loved doing it. I wouldn’t be surprised to hear a former teacher say they could have guessed my career path. Whether it was an English class where I scripted and presented a Rose for Emily or dramatized a science project; it was all drama to me. The elementary school I attended, was a short walk from Cleveland Symphony Hall. Field trips were routine and where I was first introduced to opera and my passion for classical music. Likewise, my introduction and fascination with the transformative power of theatre was breathtaking. Other career interests, such as contract and tax law, a military career and a professional athlete informs my life but didn’t captivate it. Music and theatre has transformed me and is a vocation I have witnessed change the life of people, youth ‘in an instant; the proverbial “ah ha” moment … AMAZING!

Crider: What are you looking forward to most about working at the Purdue Black Cultural Center?

continued on pg. 7
Graduates...
Each spring we give graduating BCC employees and ensemble members an opportunity to reflect and share feelings about their time at Purdue University. Read and enjoy!
Profiles of graduates are continued on pgs. 5-6.

JorDann Phillips, Movement & Sport Sciences/ Psychology, Jahari, Student Receptionist
Hometown: Indianapolis, Indiana

“When I first came to the BCC my freshman year, I was just excited to be around other students that looked like me. But as I got involved with the ensembles and I got to know the staff I began to feel at home and the BCC became a comfort zone for me and a place where I could come get a good laugh, maybe some food (if you come at the right time), and be myself. Not only a home away from home but a place that I knew no matter how big or small my problem was there’s somebody at the BCC who knows me and cares about my wellbeing. The BCC offered me a place to get the rest of the things I needed for life that can’t be taught in an academic classroom or with people who don’t know me personally. The BCC gave me the opportunity to travel and see some places I probably never would have seen. Looking back to 2011 when I started here I am a totally different person and I owe a lot of that to the students at the BCC who have shared laughs, stories, and the real BCC Punch with me, and the staff who have taken me in as one of their own and took the time to plant seeds in me so that I will already have the things I need to be successful when I am gone. To the freshmen coming into Purdue and to current students my advice to you is to GET INVOLVED and USE YOUR RESOURCES! Even if you’re not sure that’s what you want to do the experience is worth you checking it out. Be open to new things and things that may be outside of your comfort zone, your future self will thank you! Also be true to yourself and stand up for what you believe in!”

After graduation JorDann will continue on to graduate school to pursue a master’s in physical therapy with concentrations in sports rehabilitation.

Songa Rugangazi, Industrial Engineering, BVOI
Hometown: Kigali, Rwanda

“My time at the BCC has given me an opportunity to make new relationships and learn more about African American culture and being able to see how it overlaps with my own African culture. I also appreciate the opportunity I have had to participate in a structured choir seeing as how this is something that I sincerely enjoyed in high school. My advice to Purdue students who have yet to graduate is don’t be afraid to ask questions because that will be the way you learn the most and chances are, the person sitting next to you has the exact same question but is shy. So ask it!”

After graduation Songa will be working full time for Cummins Inc. in Columbus, Indiana.
Priscilla Hurn, Organizational Leadership/Building Construction, NDP, Student Receptionist
Hometown: Indianapolis, Indiana

“My time at the BCC has been great! I was a member of the New Directional Players for six semesters, serving as student coordinator for one of those semesters. I also worked as a student receptionist. I’ve gained lasting friendships, memories, and confidence from my involvement there. My favorite memory is watching the way CAF 2016 unfolded after a week of constant change and uncertainty of whether or not our performances would be good and touch the audience in the way we intended. My tip for undergrads is find something here on this campus that you love enough that makes it worth the late night studying and stresses that college comes with.”

McKeith Pearson, Molecular Biology, New Directional Players
Hometown: Indianapolis, Indiana

“I have enjoyed participating, attending events, and studying at the BCC! My favorite BCC memory is performing, especially in Coffee House. I was doing a scene from a play we were performing and I went to open my root beer and it spilled all over the floor. I had to play it off. My advice to current and future students is to plan out your courses for all 4 years ahead of time. Also if you are thinking about switching majors, it would be best to do so before your sophomore year. After graduation McKeith will continue at Purdue in graduate school for molecular engineering.

Jake Brosius, Law and Society, Haraka
Hometown: Chicago, Illinois

“This was my first year being a part of Haraka Writers. I appreciated how Haraka Writers has helped me to become more involved in the poetry world. I have always been a writer, but Haraka helped me to be more open about sharing my writing. I liked being a part of the Black Cultural Center because they accept you where you are and they help you to strengthen your skills. Thank you to the BCC and everyone in it. It is the single most accepting place I have ever been a part of! My advice for students especially freshmen is to appreciate every moment of your four years here, at Purdue; these are the fastest four years of your life, so find something you like and pursue it.” After graduation Jake will be living in Indianapolis working for the Starfish Initiative as an AmeriCorps VISTA member and later plans to attend graduate school for social work.
Brian Hunter, Ph.D. Family and Consumer Economics, Night Manager, Hometown: Greenwood, Indiana

“I was looking for a job right on campus where I would be able to contribute to Purdue during the night in a way other than teaching. I used to be a resident assistant in Purdue’s residence halls, and really enjoyed having the opportunity to look after buildings while getting to meet new people. The BCC has one of the nicest buildings on campus, and it has been a great place to work and get to meet people that I would otherwise have not encountered in my PhD program. By working here I was able to see some of what goes into making a cultural center active on a college campus. By offering the meeting spaces and the wide variety of events that the BCC sponsors, all types of students are able to participate in musical, dance, artistic, historic, and social performances and cultural activities. The contributions that the BCC has are far reaching, as it helps to bring students together who are on all points of a spectrum of familiarity and exposure to black culture. As someone who will hopefully go on to be a professor on a college campus in the US, I will always appreciate the opportunities a university can provide by supporting a well-run cultural center for patrons to become involved with. I encourage students still working towards your degree to do everything you can to put yourself in a new situation each day, in which you have to face a new challenge. You’ll meet people that you otherwise would never have had the opportunity, and will broaden your ability to solve complicated problems using what limited resources you can muster. You may even find out that you are great at things that you never realized before. Boiler Up!”

Taylor Worrell, Industrial Engineering Technology, Gordon Parks Fine Arts Ensemble Hometown: Merrillville, Indiana

“I joined the Gordon Parks Ensemble because I was looking for a photography community and opportunity to learn more about photography. I had been taking pictures for students and friends around campus and I had a couple of them suggest I join the Gordon Parks Ensemble at the BCC. It has been a perfect fit for me. I definitely gained some new skills. I learned how to adjust the settings on my camera in order to make beautiful photos, learn the different types of photography and much more! I also was able to meet great people in GPE. My advice for current students and incoming freshmen would be to take time to try different activities or join different organizations on campus that you would not typically take interest in. Taking the time to try different things allowed me to learn more about myself, develop skills I didn’t know I had, and meet great people. Never limit yourself to just one way of having fun!”

After graduation Taylor will be relocating to Fort Wayne, Indiana where she will be working for General Motors as an industrial engineer.
Surratt: Of course, working at Purdue BCC gives me the opportunity to continue my creative journey. However, quite honestly and sincerely, I look forward to my interaction with the students: guiding as well as being led by them. I delivered a lecture at Governor’s State a few years ago entitled “Youth: Messengers from the Future.” To gage the ‘temp’ in their lives, we need only listen with ‘elephant’ ears and engage in a dialogue. I feel our encounters then are mutually valuable. Coming from a family of teachers, they recognized early on that it was a natural career path for me. Of course, I rebuffed, thinking I wanted to design my own destiny. They were right and trusted ‘Dorothea’ would find her way home in some way, shape, form and fashion.

Crider: What are you passionate about and what do you enjoy doing in your spare time?

Surratt: I love and am very passionate about family, friends and community. In my spare time, I’m either catching up with them, or doing one of my favorite things, ‘solitude’ where I’m absorbed in a book, working on a composition that’s been rattling around in my head or just merely enjoying silence, quiet time. I also love to drive and enjoy doing road trips during peak season changes.

Crider: Please tell us about the upcoming NDP spring production?

Surratt: The following introduction to Birth of Protest is the result of group discussions during our first couple of weeks. After listening to their various experiences of striving to find their voice in student government and being targets of discriminatory acts, I proposed a retrospective on protest juxtaposed to Anna Deavere’s (monologue) “I’m Scared.”

Birth of Protest
When did it happen? At infancy, the moment we took our first breath in protest of that slap on the bottom? Emphatic cries of hunger before we could shape words? Righteously protecting younger siblings from neighborhood and cyber bullies or when thousands stand shoulder to shoulder as one VOICE in response to a drop down menu of “isms?” Protest is our biological alarm that sounds when ‘something is off,’ a panic leaps into our throat, a call to courageously refute injustice and inhumanity resounds in our heart. When did you RECOGNIZE it, HEAR it, FEEL it, SEE it.

Crider: What should audiences expect?

Surratt: The portrayal of their outcries of protest is poignant, funny, thoughtful, provocative, intriguing. Their stories are told with sincerity and reveal moments of passion, helplessness, love, alienation, isolation, power. I’m in AWE and we have not yet reached the summit.

Crider: Who should consider becoming a member of the New Directional Players?

Surratt: This is my first year (semester) with NDP and, I therefore can only convey the enthusiasm and commitment I’ve witnessed. The 2016 NDP Players exude delight, exuberance and pride when they talk about BCC and NDP’s substantive impact on their lives. Hmmm … sounds like an amazing place to be, right?

**New Directional Players Spring Production**

“Birth of Protest” takes place Friday-Saturday, April 15-16, 2016 7:00 p.m. at the Black Cultural Center. The event is free and open to the public. We hope to see you there.
The Purdue Black Cultural Center expects the best for our students and it is our desire for students to go to heights never imagined. Congratulations to the Class of 2016! Graduation day represents dreams fulfilled and the start of a new journey. Before you get too consumed about the next phase of your success, you should take time to celebrate this magical moment in your life. Purdue University can be a place of many challenges however you set a goal to obtain a college education and you have earned your degree. Take a moment to appreciate and applaud your success, savor this accomplishment and be inspired.

Education has the power to transform lives. Members of the Class of 2016, I look forward to reconnecting with you at a future Homecoming celebration. I can’t wait to reminisce about your special Purdue campus experiences. May the success of your Purdue degree lead to much greater achievements in the years to come. I look forward to learning about your future powerful influences and accomplishments.

Renee A. Thomas
Director