

Coming soon: Shades of Black

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Argonaut

Don't let the title fool you: Shades of Black is about culture, not race, said Kwapi Vengesayi, executive producer of the event.

The 7th annual production of Shades of Black — which will feature black fraternities and sororities, representatives from the African Alliance and God's Harmony Gospel Choir — will be hosted by Alvin Williams, a University of Idaho graduate who recently took part in the Shades of Laughter comedy tour.

The event starts Saturday at 5 p.m. in the Student Union Building Ballroom. It is free and open to the public, though the after party costs \$3 to enter until 11 p.m. when it becomes free.

Vengesayi said the show helps display the vibrant African American community at UI and Washington State University free of stereotypes. He said there are African American fraternities and sororities and an Africa Night, but no events brought all of them together.

"That was the whole premise for Shades of Black — (to) bring together different aspects of the black experience in Moscow-Pullman and then putting them on the same stage,"

Vengesayi said. "So it is a way of sharing a more unified existence to the community, but also creating a kind of relationship within ourselves."

When the show first started seven years ago, he said performers were thrown at random on stage and did what they wanted. Now, the show is reigned in and focuses on a single theme. This year's theme is "A Legacy."

"It's become a very positive cultural show," said Helene Williams, the WSU coordinator for the event.

Vengesayi expects an overflow crowd this year. He said little standing room has been available in past years, and people flowed in from around the Northwest and as far away as Alabama, with the largest portion of the audience being WSU students.

"It's humbling in the sense a place like Idaho can have people flying from Alabama just to watch a black show," Vengesayi said. "If you have black people from Alabama flying into Idaho to watch a black show, it means you're doing something right."

He said despite what UI has done, a lot still needs work in order to create a multi-cultural experience for students on the UI campus.

"You have people coming to that show because they want to learn some-

thing ... to see people dance ... because their professor told them to ... so depending (on) what someone is there for, they take something different from it (the event)," Vengesayi said.

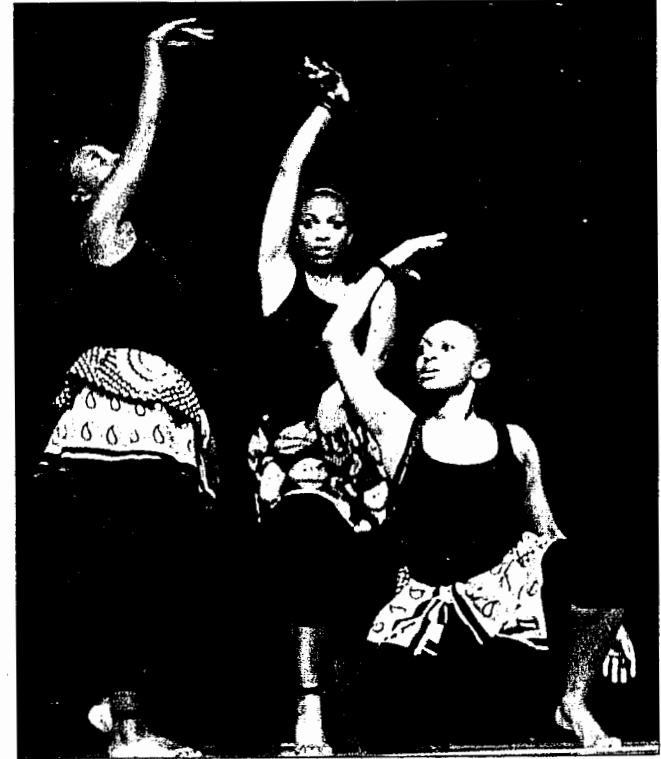
Other universities are considering similar events for their campuses, Vengesayi said.

"Boise State initially showed interest, but then kind of backed up, but Western Washington has been very intrigued by it," he said, also noting University of Washington and Seattle University as possibilities. "Then next year we will be bringing in Central Washington University so that we are ... growing."

He said even though it may grow in the future, he still wants to keep the original blueprint and not enforce stereotypes already out there on television.

He said the term "Shades of Black" is objective and broad, and could go in many directions as more universities take it up and use it to fit their campuses. He wants it to stay homegrown and run by students and for students and the Moscow-Pullman community.

The artists performing will include Iota Phi Theta fraternity, Alpha Phi Alpha fraternity, the African Alliance, God's Harmony Gospel Choir and Williams.



File Photo by Kate Kucharzyk/Argonaut
Performers dance on stage during the 2009 Shades of Black in the Student Union Building Ballroom. The 7th annual production of Shades of Black will take place Saturday at 5 p.m.