

Features

Stepping out: Alpha Phi Alpha shows the way

By Jane Roskams

Seven dark bodies move across the floor in near-perfect synchronization.

A beat, pumping out from the sound system is translated in to a rhythmic glide, shuffle and a twirl across the floor.

No, it's not the scene on the latest Michael Jackson video; it's J.W. Oysters, and the Alpha Phi Alphas are at it again.

Tonight, the Alpha Phi Alpha black fraternity will present its annual step show for the entertainment of all who attend.

The Alpha Phi Alpha fraternity is a fraternity exclusively for outstanding black students.

Each year, they organize a number of charitable events geared toward raising money for cancer research and the funding of scholarships for black schools throughout the United States.

However, the step show isn't merely a chance for the APAs to demonstrate their versatility on the dance floor, it is an integral part of their life within the APA fraternity system.

The step show originated in the early days of slavery when the main form of dance was tap. The program includes a wide variety of this kind of dance, as well as some soft shoe shuffling with just a little bit of funk and soul. The guys will be assisted in their efforts by the Alpha Angels, their sister group, who also help to make the costumes.

The national fraternity now holds an annual step show competition at its headquarters, although the APAs at the UI haven't yet entered.

From early this century to modern day video, people have always commented on the natural sense of rhythm displayed by black immigrants. Curtis Johnson, dean of pledges of the UI chapter of the fraternity, explained why.

"It comes from our original days in Africa," he said. "The drum and rhythm were an integral part of our culture, and much of our ancestors' tribal lives revolved around the tribal drum. That's why we have a natural sense of rhythm. It goes back for centuries."



Dancin' Alphas

Some of the members of the Alpha Phi Alpha Dance Team add some finishing touches to the routine they will be presenting as part of a "step show" they will be hosting tonight at J.W. Oysters. They are joined in the routine by some of the Alpha Angels, their sister group. (Photo by Deb Gilbertson)