

THE CITIZEN

Cover price R1,00

INCORPORATING THE
FINANCIAL GAZETTE

• Johannesburg Tuesday 20 December 1994

Stepping to Soweto

By Marilyn Jenkins
"STEPPING" down South Africa's way at the moment is a group from the Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity of America's Howard University, who are showing students of the Soweto Dance Theatre a new – yet strangely familiar – dance style.

Crowded around the eight guys in a room at the White City sports centre in Jabuvu, the youngsters whooped and applauded as they watched stamps and high-speed swings of the feet over the ground, accompanied by grunts and yells and slapping of thighs and buttocks.

Gumboot dancing? Pantsula? It looks like an adapted mixture of both, yet it is a form of expression which grew up entirely independent of outside influences.

On campuses

"It's done at undergraduate level on campuses," explained the leader, Brian Williams, who graduated in marketing and business from Howard some time ago, but whose work for a non-profit making organisation with African links allows him time to continue his involvement.

It was while he was working in Lesotho a couple of years ago that he discovered guys in the street doing what they called gumboot dancing, but which he recognised as uncannily like "stepping".

"Not one has researched how it started in the States, some 30 or 40 years ago, or why it's grown to the point where it really took off at the beginning of the '90's and was performed at President Clinton's inauguration.

1 000 groups

"There are now more than 1 000 groups who dance informally doing 'yard' steps – when everyone moves in a circle and no one's a leader – or 'performance' steps in a competitive environment. Sponsors put up prizes and interest is very keen."

Stepping, however, is more than a comparatively modern form of dance with its roots in an African heritage. "It is an expression of solidarity and pride in our black brotherhood," said Brian.

"I enjoy it because of this special spirit, and because it is something I can enjoy and share with my brothers."

Sharing was what this visit to SDT is all about. As the Howard group got into the hand-jive, discovered the similarity between local pantsula and "up-rocking", tried out their feet at Swazi indlamu by joining in a class being given to the SDT by some visiting Swazi teachers, and then formed individual groups to teach and be taught, it was a process of electrifying symbiosis in action.

Some American dance personalities have come here in the past with a superior attitude. Not so the Howard fraternity. "We had to fund-raise like crazy to get here," he added, "but dance is a way of connecting, and I like the partnership aspect of the whole project."

He hopes it will not only break down barriers, but also build the kind of cross-cultural communication which crosses national borders.

Who knows?

Does this mean that "stepping" in the States may never be the same again? For the Howard fraternity will inevitably incorporate some gumboot and pantsula into their

own style of dance, which may well be copied by others and influence a new trend.

"Yeah, well, who knows?" said Brian, with an easy grin. Change is the lifeblood of such a socially-based dance form. So it is hardly surprising that in the same way as women here have recently invaded the previously all-male preserve of indlamu and pantsula, so American sororities have formed their own stepping groups.

The Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity will give a final workshop at the SDT today and will take part in the company's end of year concert tomorrow afternoon at the Orlando YMCA.



UNION BILLIARDS

FOR A FULL RANGE OF POOL AND
SNOOKER TABLES AND
ACCESSORIES

Repairs and moving service

SANDTON 883-7277
BEDFORDVIEW 616-6112
KRUIS ST 334-1166
PRETORIA (012) 546-0688
DURBAN (031) 32-7557
CAPE TOWN (021) 45-4406

Fraternity to step in Soweto, South Africa

By **Stacy Berry**
Hilltop Staff Writer

The brothers of the Beta Chapter of Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity Inc. have been invited to display their stepping talents in workshops sponsored by the Soweto Dance Theatre.

As South Africa celebrates its first year of independence from apartheid, the Soweto Dance Theatre wishes to broaden the international outlook of its participants by encouraging groups from around the world to participate in the Soweto workshops.

The art of stepping has recently captured the imagination of the American public. Initiated in the 1940's by black fraternities and sororities as a means of celebrating themselves, stepping has evolved into a highly technical dance form

that rivals such African-American creations as tap dance, house dancing, popping and urban contemporary steps.

Each year the Soweto Dance Theatre has brought together over 1000 children in the Orlando East section of Soweto.

"We were all very happy to receive the invitation to step in South Africa", Chapter President, Desmond Dunham said. "When we make our trip to South Africa we want to do more than step we want to bridge the gap between African and African American children."

The Alphas will attend the South African Workshops pending the long arduous task of fundraising. The fraternity members have estimated their expenses to be 25,000 dollars for the trip.

"We are going to solicit money from a variety of sources, including

a raffle, undergraduate and Graduate chapters of Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity Inc, and area companies," Fraternity Brother C. Bryan Williams said. "We have set a \$10,000 goal for November 1, 1994."

The trip to South Africa will be the first of its kind for the fraternity and the Step team members of Beta Chapter of Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity Inc. are looking forward to displaying not only their stepping talents to the South African children.

"We are looking at this as sort of a goodwill mission. We are going to have a clean-up campaign in Soweto, and teach the community to work for themselves," Williams added.

South African performances will be held in community civic centers, town halls, markets and the streets to insure contact with the masses of

South Africa.

"I am really looking forward to spending time with the South African people," second Vice President Colin Thompson said. "The time we spend there will make our understanding of stepping much stronger. Our fraternity was founded on Egyptian philosophies, to go back to where it all came from is to strengthen our ties."

Upon return, the Alphas will embark on a series of developmental education here in the United States. The Brother to Brother program will attempt to encompass all that the Alphas learn from Africa.

For more information on Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity Inc., Beta Chapters Soweto trip fundraising activities or if you or your organization will like to assist please contact, C. Bryan Williams at (202) 832-4394.

FINAL

THE CITIZEN

*INCORPORATING THE
FINANCIAL GAZETTE*

● Johannesburg Friday 23 December 1994

Cover price R1,00

SHOWTIME

Stepping in Soweto

WITH pigeons flying in and out of holes in the ceiling board, and the whoops and whistles of enthusiasm from the young audience loud enough to bring down a few more pieces, the end of year concert of the Soweto Dance Theatre was nothing if not informal.

It started an hour late, and Collen Hlatshwayo had to perform like a one man cabaret as the MC, trying to keep track of which groups were on hand to dance and which had not arrived.

The main guests were the brothers from Alpha Phi Alpha at Howard University in the USA, who showed the varied faces of "stepping", a dance style which has evolved entirely independent of South Africa's gumboot and pantsula, but which bears many similarities to them.

The parallels were startling, from jumps, slaps and spins, to fast wielded batons which were reminiscent of Xhosa stick dancing. There were elements of drum majorette strutting, break dancing and even Scottish sword dancing with one blindfolded man prone on the ground, snapping his legs open and closed, while another blindfolded man leapt in and out of the scissor openings.

The programme also included a representative mix of township dance forms, from the Thabisong Youth Club's slick gumboot routines to Salt & Pepper's three girls miming and moving seductively to rap music.

The pantsula showed several different facets of this constantly evolving dance form. The splendid Via Katlehong Pantsulas of David Lekhoba, Mpho Mokotedi, Patrick Qofela

and Tshope Lesawane performed new, well-oiled routines which combined straight lines and diagonals with backward circular skips, and much more flexibility in the upper torso.

Their sense of performance and easy style as they shifted through different patterns was a pleasure to watch.

More laid back were London Dickies Lovers, with the three men going

DANCE: Soweto Dance Theatre End of Year Concert (Orlando YMCA, Soweto).

By Marilyn Jenkins

through their staccato, magic lantern routines with wry humour, bouncing imaginary balls and kicking their ankles quite high.

A softer, almost delicate pantsula style came from the D H Boys from Orlando East, with jelly rolls and shoulder shim-

mies, while from Ipelegeng came five bare-chested men in yellow satin trousers who brought the martial arts into their high travelling steps and angled thrusting arms.

Another side to urban dance came from the nine youngsters in school uniforms who gave their

interpretation of the Lord's Prayer accompanied by slow motion high kicks, and the inevitable Safarina.

Various groups affiliated to the Soweto Dance Theatre also performed, including students who showed off what they had learnt in the recent ethnic workshops.

The women danced the Sotho and Swazi pieces, while the men got down to the Tsonga and Zulu.

The Alpha Phi Alpha brothers were persuaded to join in the Zulu and at the end of the concert they presented Jackie Semela of the SDT with a cheque for R1 000 to help further the company's work.

As spokesman Brian Williams pointed out, the Alpha Phi Alpha fraternity is not only about stepping. It's about education and service to the community, and the contact now established through their workshops with SDT will be continued in the years to come.



Dancers from Alpha Phi Alpha at Howard University, USA, demonstrate the art of "Stepping". From left are group leader BRIAN WILLIAMS, BRETT ALLEN, PAUL WOODRUFF, SEAN GAYLE (partially obscured), and DESMOND DUNHAN.