

Dallas Black Dance Theatre Offers Creative Learning Opportunities with Cultural Awareness Series

Dallas Black Dance Theatre (DBDT), the legendary Dallas-based dance company founded by Ann Williams, is one of the country's most community-minded dance companies. For 2018, they have generously partnered with Dallas' Office of Cultural Affairs and are scheduled to perform at several local institutions, including various local cultural centers around Dallas and the Dallas Public Library. In addition to their many local performances, DBDT are a company that gives back to the community through its focus on arts education and by bringing performances and workshops to schools around the metroplex. These performance opportunities help break down the various financial, travel and time-based barriers that might otherwise prevent a young audience from being able to see and experience a professional dance performance.

Continuing to fulfill their mission of providing education through the arts, Dallas Black Dance Theatre held a *Cultural Awareness Series* student matinee at the Wyly Theatre this past February. School districts and interested students were invited from every corner of Texas to participate in dance classes and to attend a Dallas Black Dance Theatre matinee performance.

As a testament to the public's widely held respect and admiration for them, the demand for Dallas Black Dance Theatre's *Cultural Awareness Series* student matinee was so great, that the dance company added a third performance to their already packed series of events. Fortunately, the Wyly Theater and the AT&T Performing Arts Center were able to accommodate two matinees on February 15, and one on February 16.

The matinee performance included DBDT dancers demonstrating ballet, modern and jazz techniques. The students were also treated to an educational look at the state-of-the-art Wyly Theater stage and lighting effects. The dancers performed *Essence* by Christopher L. Huggins and *Tribute* by Matthew Rushing. *Tribute* was originally developed/produced/premiered at Dallas Black Dance Theatre with support from the TACA Donna Wilhelm Family New Works Fund.

The attendance numbers for this program reached a staggering 1500 students; coming from all around the Dallas / Fort Worth metroplex, including: Dallas ISD, Richardson ISD, Garland ISD, Lancaster ISD, as well as Austin and Irvin High Schools in El Paso, Texas.

These staggering attendance numbers prove that kids and educators are hungry for the arts. Rather than cutting arts programs from school curricula, legislators and school boards should endeavor to support funding and fostering an arts-based education. Isela Granados, a dance instructor from Irvin High School in El Paso said, "In El Paso, Texas, we don't have the opportunity to take African dance classes. We are very limited to dance styles and, as a teacher, I want to expose my students to as many dance styles as possible. Dallas Black Dance Theatre has inspired my students to venture out of their comfort and want to actually learn more about the history of African Americans and African dance. They have more questions and want to return to DBDT. It was truly an amazing experience for all of us."

A study conducted by the Texas Cultural Trust in 2017 showed that students who complete more arts classes have up to 15% higher pass rates on standardized tests than students with fewer arts classes. In addition, Texas high school students engaged in the arts had a 3.3% percentage point greater attendance rate than their counterparts, who were not engaged in the arts.

Educators and parents see the value in arts programming for creating a diverse and well-rounded educational experience. 95% of parents believe that the arts should be taught in Texas public schools, while more than 80% of the parents who were surveyed had participated in the arts in middle or high school. With these kinds of numbers and support, there really is no justification for cutting so many arts programs across Texas.

Katriccia Eaglin, Director of Dallas Black Dance Academy who taught the African class for the El Paso students said, "It is important for students to see modern dance at its highest level performed by this diverse company, to show that goals can be set and achieved. Students having an opportunity to hear from the dancers during the matinees allows them to see the various paths you can take to become a professional dancer".

Programs like the *Cultural Awareness Series* helps to keep kids engaged in the arts and explore career options. El Paso area high school student, Treana said, "I thought the show was very inspiring. I am just a freshman starting in the dance team and this is an experience I will never forget. This was very unique and incredible." Another student, Antiana from Irvin High School in El Paso, said "I enjoyed this show. It was so amazing, the purpose of it, especially. It was life changing and I hope I can come back because I have purpose in life now."



Pictured: Students lined up for a DBDT student matinee



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We are currently enrolling for the summer and fall semesters!

Kids are finding their path and purpose through the arts and I applaud Dallas Black Dance Theatre for their continued dedication and innovation in providing kids the opportunity to experience the arts.

In addition to Modern and African, Dallas Black Dance Academy teaches Ballet, Jazz, and Tap. Students from more than 100 zip codes across the DFW metroplex take classes at Dallas Black Dance Academy. For more information visit www.DBDA.com



Pictured: DBDA Master Class




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