

Dehkontee Artists Theatre Wows the Crowd at the Bowie Center for the Performing Arts with a Broadway Style Spectacular African Theatrical Performance!



A scene from Dr. Joe Gbaba's "The Frogs and Black Snake in Frogsville" staged at the Bowie Center for the Performing Arts on Saturday, January 9, 2016

Dehkontee Artists Theatre wowed the crowd at the Bowie Center for the Performing Arts last night (January 9th, 2016) with a Broadway style spectacular display of African folklore and pageantry and African theatrical performance! The thespians kept the audience spellbound and glued to their seats without intermission for an hour and a half. The African folkloristic theatrical presentation was also action packed and comical. It ended in a suspenseful denouement just when the spectators had comfortably adjusted themselves in their seats and were craving for more entertainment from the Dehkontee Artists that put up a magnificent African production of Joe Gbaba's "The Frogs and Black Snake in Frogsville".

Mainly, the unquenchable thirst and anxiety from the spectators was sparked by the notoriety of Black Snake preying on the fat greasy frogs of Frogsville. In the end he chased the frogs out of their own village and forced them to flee for their lives and seek refuge in the swamps of Soniwen! However, the Narrator in the play (Alie Kamara) promised the enthused audience that DATI would present a sequel to the show (a Part Two of "The Frogs and Black Snake in Frogsville") in the near future (August 20th, 2016) at the same venue to quench their desire for more African folklore and fables!



Black Snake (played by Daniel Kevin Moore) threatens to eat the animals in Frogsville in Joe Gbaba's "The Frogs and Black Snake in Frogsville" staged at the Bowie Center for the Performing Arts (Saturday, January 9, 2016)

The glamorous event was in observance of the 39th Anniversary of the founding of Dehkontee Artists Theatre and the 42nd Celebration of UNC-Greensboro trained director and actor, Dr. Joe Gbaba as a notable American Liberian theatre icon and playwright! The colorful ceremony was graced by a onetime student of Dr. Joe Gbaba, His Excellency Jeremiah Sulunteh, the Liberian Ambassador accredited near Washington, D.C., who was accompanied by his wife and some members of the Liberian Embassy staff. Also present in the theatre were some local officials of Prince George's County in the State of Maryland, as well as the Chair Lady and members of DATI's Patrons Club: Mrs. Comfort Shilue-Sobah, Alfreda Chaeyee-Morris, Mr. and Mrs. Isaac and Amanda Yah; DATI's President James Krischen Wah, Sr.; DATI's Board of Directors members Emmanuel Kwame Gbedee and Juliana Koffa-Dixon; Mr. Philip Krawlay Klah, Sr., President of the Liberian Community in the Research Triangle of Durham, Raleigh, and Chapel Hill in North Carolina; maternal uncles and aunt of Dr. Gbaba, including James Glaywulu, Smith Mooney, Joseph and Edith Wallekenneh; ULAA's Secretary-General Arthur Doe, and the United Tchien Association in the America's President Anthony Urey and his delegation. Other attendees included senior citizens, parents and children as well as Liberian and U.S. citizens and Bowie residents of varied age groups and racial demographics that remained speechless and fascinated by the colorful costumes of the animal characters and picturesque African set design.

The production began with a preview that consisted of the brief history of DATI's establishment at the University of Liberia in 1977 and highlights of the contributions made by the organization and its founder Dr. Joe "Shakespeare" Gbaba toward the promotion and preservation of Liberian/African arts and culture worldwide. Special tributes were made to DATI's first Grand Patron, the late President of the Republic of Liberia, Dr. William R. Tolbert, Jr., and Dr. MacKinley A. Deshield, Jr., First Sponsor of Dehkontee Artists Theatre and former Dean of the College of Agriculture and Forestry. DATI also paid homage and observed a moment of silence for a dear friend of the organization named Mrs. Mary Nusser, the late Outreach Coordinator of the Bowie Center for the Performing Arts who suddenly passed away recently.



A scene from the Dehkontee Artists production of "The Frogs and Black Snake in Frogsville" written and directed by Dr. Joe Gbaba and performed at the Bowie Center for the Performing Arts (Saturday, January 9, 2016)

The curtains opened at sharp 7:30 p.m. with the agile and adept Narrator Alie Kamara, an African American of Sierra Leonean descent dressed in his spectacular zebra costume. Alie fantastically introduced the fable of "The Frogs and Black Snake in Frogsville" by vividly delivering his lines in a minstrel-like fashion. He was totally immersed in his role and kept the theme of the play and the audience glued together and awake as he appeared in various scenes in the play and provided sequential continuum of the storyline to engage the audience. At one point of the production one person from the audience shouted out loudly in affirmation of a story the Narrator told about the disunity among the frogs in Frogsville. The three happy frogs of Frogsville (Toad, Bull, and Spring Frogs) were played by a father-and-sons trio: Dr. Joe Gbaba as Spring Frog, Julian Gbaba as Toad and Jacques Gbaba as Bull Frogs. The trio demonstrated a spirit of comradery while at the same time painting a clear picture of dissent among the frogs in Frogsville.

Annette Landers contributed immensely to the success of the production in many capacities: she played Mother Toad, and served as both the scenic designer for the set and the Green Carpet Event and as make-up artist. As Mother Toad and head wife of Toad the Wise One Mother Toad depicted the role of a devoted wife and mother of Baby Toad played by Ariminta Gbaba (wife of DATI's Executive Director Dr. Joe Gbaba). Together the Toads spiced up the production with their husband-wife and mother-daughter bonds that portrayed true African family life and interrelationships. The awesome performance of the Toads was complemented by "Chay-chay-polay Chicken" played by Rita Pierre, a die-heart DATI member who travelled with her family from the State of Tennessee to celebrate with her DATI colleagues. Another DATI member that showed up for the occasion was Lars Tomo McCritty. He helped with stage management and participated as one of the guards to Black Snake.



Well, "Talk about the devil and he appears", the old folks say. Black Snake (Daniel Kevin Moore, Jr.) nailed it! He kept the crowd on their heels for his notoriety as the archenemy of the frogs. For an example, Black Snake hissed and jeered at the frogs and horrifyingly chased them out of Frogsville after he was elected Chief of Frogsville! More importantly, Daniel Moore's portrayal of Black Snake punctuated the morale of the play that is centered on the need for national unity and rule of law in society. The play also promotes the principles of democracy; endorses cultural and political tolerance and stresses the need for voters' education to ensure the holding of free and fair general elections worldwide.

The protocol of the night ended with a "Green Carpet Event" during which members of the audience, including the Liberian Ambassador Mr. Jeremiah Sulunteh, had an opportunity to participate in photo shoots on the green carpet with cast members of "The Frogs and Black Snake in Frogsville". Also, copies of the published text of the play and narrative version of "The Frogs and Black Snake in Frogsville" were on sale and some copies of the published narrative

version of the play were autographed by the author and Executive Director of DATI Dr. Joe Gbaba.



Black Snake (Daniel Kevin Moore, Jr.) on the Green Carpet with Liberian Ambassador and Mrs. Jeremiah Sulunteh and other distinguished guests.

Future DATI Performance

The public is hereby asked to look out for DATI's next showing of "The Frogs and Black Snake in Frogsville" during the spring and summer months of 2016. Also, auditions for its forthcoming production of "Love for Mymah" will be announced shortly. The play may be presented at the Bowie Center for the Performing Arts on August 20, 2016. Furthermore, the Management of Dehkontee Artists Theatre, Inc. extends its grateful thanks and appreciation to the City of Bowie for its generous grant provided to partly help underwrite the cost of the event. Grateful thanks also go to Councilman Todd Turner of District # 4 and Councilwoman Karen Toles of District # 7 of Prince George's County, the Lieutenant Governor of Maryland Byod Rutherford and his wife Mrs. Monica Rutherford and all those who favorably responded to DATI's kind invitation to attend or acknowledge appreciation of DATI's efforts to promote culture and entertainment for residents of the City of Bowie at the Bowie Center for the Performing Arts.

Published by DATI's Public Relations Bureau

10 January, 2016

