

September 19, 2011

Company shares 'therapy' of dance performance



Collin Heyward sat in a lobby chair of the Towson University Marriot Conference Hotel, unwinding after his two-and-a-half-hour dance performance earlier that Friday evening. Guests continually stopped and praised his performance on their way to the restroom, gushing about their favorite pieces.

Heyward thanked them for their compliments and answered their questions: "How long have you been dancing?" "Where did you grow up?" "Do you enjoy it?"

"It's a little overwhelming," Heyward said.

Heyward said he doesn't treat dance so seriously, and that all he tries to do when he dances is express to the audience his passion for the art.

"Dance is therapy," he said. "Without dance, I don't know where I'd be. I can have a bad day and there's always a dance studio to go to. You can just improv in your own room at home."

The 22-year-old has still made a career for himself as a member of the Ailey II, one of the most well-recognized dance companies in the world. He, along with 10 other company members, performed classic Ailey II pieces including "Revelations" for a sold-out audience Friday. Troy Powell, the artistic director for Ailey II, said it's good for the dance students to model themselves off Heyward's poise and attitude while performing.

"I think what I encourage my students and the dancers at Ailey II is to just be yourself and enjoy every moment of it," Powell said. "Audiences come to see that energy. Don't take it too seriously. And learn from it." Powell said students in the college-age range tend to over think dance because they experience more outside distractions, like other course work and personal issues.

"You want to be able to come into your studio, what I call your realm, and heal from those distractions," he said. "Dance shouldn't be something that makes you crazy, dance should be something that calms you. That's what I want to pass on to student dancers."

Heyward said that originally he was insecure when he first started dancing because of his condition commonly known as "bow leg," where the thighs tend to bow outwards, giving the appearance of an arch.

"I just told myself that this is the way God made me and it can be my biggest enemy or my greatest companion, so I work to work with it," he said.

He said the challenges of dance, combined with the monotonous nature of dancing, can wear many students down.

"It can get so repetitive and some lose that spark," Heyward said. "You have to tell yourself you have a long-term goal to get to. And it's hard. It's hard doing the same thing every day and having your teachers correct you on the same old things that you feel like you can't correct."

Nicole Martinell, a part-time professor in the Department of Dance, said that Ailey II's presence at Towson will help revitalize the students' motivation.

"I know there's going to be this huge shift in atmosphere because of this concert," she said. "People are going to be energized, they're going to be excited about their choreography."

They're going to be trying new things, because I know I will."

