

Kyle Burnett/The BATTALION

A&M student Aval Allen brings campus culture to life

By Dena Dizdar

THE BATTALION

Aval Allen describes her dance style as free and uninhibited, but her weekly schedule can only be described as the opposite.

Allen, a sophomore school health major, balances hours of dance classes, instruction and rehearsals with independent dance performances and Voices of Praise gospel choir practices that last "as long as the spirit moves us."

Among her many roles, Allen teaches a weekly modern dance class through Texas A&M's Dance Arts Society. She also serves as vice president for the organization. With these positions comes meetings, classes and preparation.

But Allen's 4.0 grade-point ratio has not suffered. Her three scholarships to Texas A&M are enough incentive to make time for studying.

Allen, 18, learned to manage her academic and artistic roles at Houston's High School for the Performing and Visual Arts. There, she was able to fine tune her style of dance while getting an education. Quite a contrast to the scientific and agriculturally-minded university she chose to attend.



"I was used to sitting in calculus class and hearing a string quartet playing Vivaldi in the background," Allen said. "When I came here, it was like walking into a cultural abyss for me."

That's precisely why Allen said she decided to become actively involved in Dance Arts Society and the dance ensemble Fade to Black. Allen does not have ambitions of becoming a

professional dancer after school, but she said there will always be room for dance in her life. It is a part of her ministry.

"I try to get people to see that there has to be more than just moving your arms and legs," Allen said. "When I dance, I don't dance for me, I dance for God."

Dance Arts Society president Keith Herrmann said it is that spirit that makes Allen one of the most graceful dancers he's seen in a long time.

"It's her outlook on life that makes her different," said Herrmann, a senior management major. "She's never unpleasant, and when she's dancing, she's always happy."

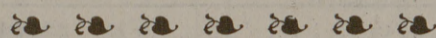
The great thing about Allen, Herrmann said, is that she still has time left at A&M to build the Dance Arts program.

"I feel better about leaving, knowing Aval will be around," he said. "Our membership has never been like it is now and I would hate to see it drop off."

Allen said she will continue to work with the program and to dance for her own enjoyment as long as she can.

"I think if you saw me at 86 years old, I would still be dancing," Allen said.

Texas Renaissance Festival showcases diverse entertainment



By Margaret Cloughton

THE BATTALION

Where can you find human chess matches, flaming idiots, knights and an Asian elephant? Try traveling to Plantersville, Texas, home of the Texas Renaissance Festival.

The festival recreates a 16th century English village with the arts, crafts, foods and costumes of the Renaissance era. The 237-acre festival is the largest Renaissance theme park in the U.S. and has been running for 19 years.

This year has been declared "The Year of the Falcon" at the festival. Steve Hoddy, a nationally known falconer, will exhibit his birds of prey, including a Peregrine Falcon, performing free-flight stunts. The Peregrine Falcon is considered the fastest animal in the world.

"Benny", a one-year-old Asian elephant and his trainer Bill Swain are two more new additions to the festival. "Benny" is the youngest privately owned elephant in the U.S.

Entertainers returning to the festival include The Flaming Idiots, the Ded Bob show and Medumo's Drums of Africa.

The Flaming Idiots are four-year veterans of the Texas Renaissance Festival. The trio consisting of Gyro, Pyro and Walter, perform bull's eye whip-cracking, remedial acrobatics and juggling feats. The Flaming Idiots have appeared on Fox television's "Comic Strip Live" and "Sunday Comics" as well as ABC's "America's Super Showcase"

"The festival is a great place to perform," said Jon O'Connor, "Pyro" of the Flaming Idiots. "It's a great place to get an act together. It's also nice because you have total freedom and can have fun with it."

The Flaming Idiots met nine years ago through mutual friends at the festival and have been performing together ever since.

"It's fun to perform for Texans," O'Connor said. "They're always very outgoing."

Medumo's Drums of Africa

are a traditional African music group who joined the festival last year.

The festival also includes sports from the Renaissance era such as jousting matches, chariot races and human chess matches.

Jeff Baldwin, choreographer for the festival's staged fights, said there is an average of 20 fights per day all over the festival.

"There are fights using the broadstaff, the quarterstaff, daggers and hand-to-hand fights," Baldwin said.

During human chess matches, players representing chess pieces actually combat each other for a desired square.

"The players combat for the square using real weapons. So, whoever wins the fight takes the square," Baldwin said.

Entertainment for children is also available in Sherwood Forest playground. This area includes the Giant Swing, the Maze, elephant and camel rides and the Dizzy Dragon ride.

Throughout the Renaissance festival, actors portray characters of the times — Robin Hood and his Merry Men, King Henry VIII, Queen Anne, Don Quixote, and Chaucer's wife of Bath. Each actor has studied his or her character thoroughly in order to portray them correctly.

Food at the festival covers a broad international spectrum. For the past few years, the Texas Renaissance Festival has been working to provide a more culturally diverse environment. The food specialties are not limited to English cuisine. Italian pizza, Spanish empanadas, German wiener schnitzel, and French herb-roasted chicken are also served. The live entertainment is also culturally diverse including performances from Spain, Italy, France, Germany, China and Poland.

The Texas Renaissance Festival runs from Oct. 2 through Nov. 14, on Saturdays and Sundays. It is located 50 miles Northwest of Houston on Highway 1774 between Plantersville and Magnolia. Each festival day lasts from 9:00 a.m. to dusk, rain or shine.

REVIEWS

Alabama's new album...

'Cheap Seats' sells out to crossover country sound

By Lesa Ann King

THE BATTALION

"Cheap Seats"
Alabama
Country
RCA

Album courtesy of CD Warehouse

Country music fans that like the more commercial sound of Alabama's recent albums, will like their new release, "Cheap Seats." But for those who miss the old-time traditional sound of Alabama, the wait is not over yet.

The new release offers a few new cuts that do justice to the vocal talents and abilities of this well known country band.

"That Feeling" reflects back on the old-time Alabama sound. Penned by band member Ted Gentry along with Greg Fowler and Ronnie Roger, the song has some of the best lyrics on the album.

Another cut, "Angels Among Us" takes a touching look at the concept of living with angels in the form of friends and kind strangers. Similar to the sound of the Alabama song "Pass It On Down," "Angels" includes a chorus in the background which adds to the angelic effect.

A sentimental sad song, "Katy Brought my Guitar Back Today" takes a look at the end of a relationship through the eyes of a musician.

While, "A Better Word for Love," a precious love song, also merits a listen as

one of the better album cuts.

The rest of the songs of the album either don't flow smoothly or lack lyrical depth.

The title cut, "Cheap Seats" talks about small town baseball games. While it's a great idea, the song sounds choppy and needs a more defined sound.

In addition, "T.L.C.A.S.A.P." sounds like a big mess of alphabet soup and is quite annoying to listen to.

Furthermore, "Reckless" reflects the tone of most of the albums faster cuts — erratic and noisy.

Half of the album can potentially appeal to old Alabama fans, while the rest of the cuts reflect a band that is selling out to a crossover country sound.

MUSIC



Members of Alabama, (clockwise from top) Teddy Gentry, Jeff Cook, Mark Herndon and Randy Owen have released a new album.

PLAY

'Saturday Night' creates thought-provoking atmosphere about South African life

By Anas Ben-Musa

THE BATTALION

"Saturday Night at the Palace" by Paul Slabolepszy
Starring Rapulana Seiphemo, Steve Mize and Sam Levensar, Jr.
Directed by Roger Schultz
Playing at Rudder Forum
- Oct. 14-16, 845-1234

Theatre Inkululeko's "Saturday Night at the Palace" throws the audience into an environment that is gritty, heartless and cruel at times.

Whether the characters are white or black, the bully or the bullied, the racist or the victim — the inability to place them in traditional roles makes Paul Slabolepszy's work an exceptional play about South Africa. Set on a deserted

highway near a roadside cafe called The Palace, the play grates on the emotions of the audience without enabling them to grasp any particular character as the protagonist or antagonist.

Many times, Paul Slabolepszy's play leads the audience. One character might be considered the protagonist, the moral character that will help them understand the animosity and hatred that has grown between white and black South Africans. Yet, Slabolepszy quickly reveals the characters' flaws and suddenly the audience again feels out of touch.

Throughout the play, the characters seem traditional. You believe Forsie (Steve Mize), a white South African, tries to respect and understand black South Africans. In addition, you believe Forsie's friend Vince (Sam Levensar, Jr.) is the real problem of South Africa. He blames blacks for his troubled life.

Slabolepszy never justifies racism. He focuses on white South Africans' fear of change.

Vince symbolizes that fear, while Forsie symbolizes the new generation of whites who want to understand and learn about their fellow black compatriots.

But, Vince's fear and distrust interferes with the process and Forsie cannot let go of his friend although he tries several times to leave him.

Left with September (Rapulana Seiphemo), the audience believes he is the sanity in this chaotic world Slabolepszy creates, but September is the victim and has little ability to control or change this world. He is only a

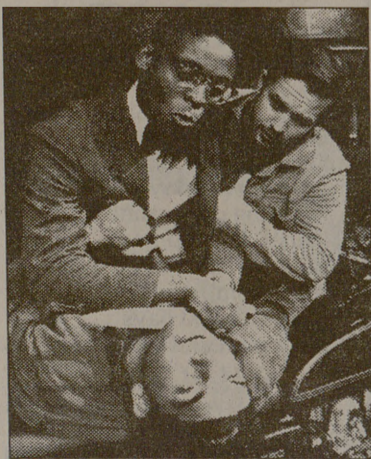
black man in South Africa.

Seiphemo's portrayal of September is touching and intelligent. His presence on stage and charisma makes "Saturday Night" an exceptional play rather than just a good play.

In addition, Levensar's portrayal is terrifyingly real. His character's bitterness and hatred toward blacks is uncomfortable to watch at times. So uncomfortable, that leaving the theater or screaming at Vince's ignorance and cruelty would be the only relief.

Mize's character tries to sympathize and comfort both, but he could never decide what to do. Mize has a difficult part, but he is able to pull it through.

"Saturday Night at the Palace" creates a thought-provoking atmosphere for the audience to experience and realize what South Africa is about.



Mike Steele/The BATTALION

Rapulana Seiphemo (left), Steve Mize (right) and Sam Levensar, Jr.