

Residency at University of Southern Mississippi's Department of Theatre & Dance

March 26-April 1, 2006

Student Comments on Etienne Cakpo's residency



Last week in class we all had the opportunity to dance with choreographer and dancer Etienne Cakpo. At first I was a little afraid because I had not had any formal African training. However, after we started the floor sequence I began to feel at ease. The classes we took this week were the most intense classes I have had from a guest artist here at Southern Miss. Every part of my body felt like it was awakened with stretching and hard exercising. Literally after we finished the center work, my leotard was completely drenched with sweat. I really appreciated Etienne's commitment to each piece of movement he shows and demonstrates. You can tell by just the way he speaks about dance that he loves it more than himself. It is as though he feels honored just to be a part of something bigger than he.

When we had the lecture demonstration, I had the greatest appreciation for him being here. I loved that in his culture, dance was in direct correlation with the earth, rhythm, musicality, spirituality, and life. When we watched his video, we learned that dance is universal and you do not have to be totally technically trained to appreciate and love dance as an art form and way of life. I thought that his insight on dance was a huge testimony on how dance is an art form that can be passed from generation through generation. I enjoyed having him here and he brought a positive light to our department.

~A. Floyd, senior dance major

I LOVED Etienne's classes—I thought that he was fantastic! I just felt that his pure love of LIFE was shining through at all times, and that is extraordinary to me. His movement was really hard! It killed my back :) He was so fluid through his shoulders and upper torso, it was insane! Dance and the language of movement amazes me. Dance truly is a universal language. Just having Etienne barely speak at all during his classes was so different, but somehow, I never felt lost. If I just watched him, I knew exactly what he was asking us to do. He communicated his intentions for us with his body. I am in awe when I think about that. How lucky are we?! We can communicate everything we know just with our bodies. Words do not HAVE to be involved. I just think this is amazing. Thank you for bringing Etienne in this week. I wish he could have stayed longer. I hope, no matter what, that in the future you guys don't ever stop bringing guest artists in like this. And the wide variety I have had since I've been here has been amazing. It's SO important.

~K. Allen, senior dance major

I have to say that out of all of the guest artists that have been through here, Etienne has been my favorite. I think it had something to do with how different he was. I liked that Etienne couldn't speak English fluently...it made the class move the entire time because he didn't break things down step by step. You just had to watch (my kind of learning). He had the curtain shut most of the time which helped a lot. We couldn't see how goofy we looked so we didn't get self conscious. His lecture was awesome. It's amazing to see homemade video of such a different culture and hear him make things relevant to us. I know the value of having other kinds of guest artists come in, but it was awesome to have someone and something so different from what we do everyday.

~K. Marlette, senior dance major

I really enjoyed Etienne's class this past week. I haven't sweated like that in a long time. His movement was hard to accomplish but I did it. I was excited when he got here because I knew that we were going to do African Dance, which I love. He is so talented when he dances. He expresses his movement in a way that I have never seen before. I could tell in his dancing that he expresses his emotions in how he feels and what he believes in. I loved working with Etienne and I hope that I get the chance to work with him again in the near future because he really had a great impact on me this past week in modern dance

~J. Carter, senior dance major

This past week in modern, I had a great time taking class from Etienne. I really like the African movement, but found it to be very difficult. I found myself having to work extra hard to find the articulation and fluidness that he wanted. The class was awesome and tiring at the same time. I really would have liked to learn a center phrase instead of just going across the floor the whole time. Overall, I thought that this was an excellent experience. After the lecture demonstration, I realized that I felt more educated in dance and in other cultures. Etienne opened my eyes not only to new movement but to an understanding of a new culture.

~M. Tubbs, senior dance major

Having a guest artist come into our department is a huge eye opener. It was a great experience to learn a new type of modern. More of a cultural lesson rather than a technique lesson. This past week in modern I have learned, that sometimes it isn't easy to try new things, but if you keep working towards things that first feel awkward they will come. I feel that I can apply this to technique class in the next few weeks. The reason is because just like Cunningham was awkward at first I feel a few more weeks and it would have felt natural. This would categorize into risk taking. This would be risk taking out of my comfort zones trying new things. I really enjoyed the African-based classes but feel that if we would have had the lecture Monday instead of Thursday, the students would have had a better understanding of where our guest artist came from.

~ J. Centola, senior dance major

This past week was with our guest artist. I absolutely loved all of his classes. They were definitely challenging for me. I have taken some African dance classes before and they were nothing like Etienne's but I tried to keep an open mind. I think it is important to be open to all styles and push to be versatile. Etienne was a great teacher with a very sincere personality. He made me smile and definitely sweat. All the torso work really made me aware of my back muscles that I may not use all the time. Whew, was I sore! The movement was also very grounded and made me get deep and down in my legs. It reminded me of how I need to continue to build my leg strength.

~S. Manry, junior dance major

I absolutely loved Etienne's classes. The movement definitely didn't come natural to me but I still loved learning and performing it. His classes reminded me how great it is to be in a field where there doesn't have to be vocal communication in order to learn a lot of new stuff. I've actually never taken a class from someone who didn't speak much English. It was a new but really interesting and cool experience. I liked the fact that there was no choice but to just watch the movement and then repeat it without being given a verbal explanation on how to execute it. I tend to overanalyze movement sometimes when I'm given a verbal description of it but in his classes I was forced to just jump in and try it right away. I was reminded how rewarding it can be to just jump right into the movement without thinking about it or breaking it down first. I've really! I've enjoyed many of the guest artists that we've had since I've been at USM but Etienne was without a doubt my favorite

~A. Pisani, senior dance major