

LIFESTYLE

A dancing,
singing
spectacular

On Sunday night some of the Island's top dance acts, supported by numerous vocal talents, took part in the first annual 'Dancing for Success' competition. Reporter **Stacey Smith** watched the entertainers go through their paces.

Photographs by Meredith Andrews

A real feel-good night. Although faces in the audience were both young and old, the positive vibe present at the Fairmont Southampton's Mid-Ocean Amphitheatre from beginning to end on Sunday night created a youthful energy throughout the auditorium.

Although the room was not completely full, it was evident that much of Bermuda took the opportunity to see performances by some of the Island's top young entertainers for the 'Dancing for Success' competition, an event which had \$7,000 worth of scholarships up for grabs.

The stage was set with lights red and blue beaming against the black floor and curtain, while the soulful sound of John Legend helped to create a warm atmosphere before the show began.

Seated at the judges table were internationally acclaimed Maher Benham, founder and artistic director of the company 'Cayote Dancers', Delores Browne, director and company teacher for Alvin Ailey Dance Company, and, Lisa Jordan, who has done choreography for various gospel artists including Kirk Franklin, Donnie McCurklin and Fred Hammond.

The host, Thaa Dill from HOTT 107.5, maintained a light-hearted tone throughout the night and is to be commended for his excellent ability to entertain the audience when the stage was bare.

Although it is unfortunate that more of the Island's dance schools were unable to participate, Jackson school of Dance (Jackson's) and United Dance Productions (UDP), tore up the stage in an evening of pure fun.

The show began with a category of modern dance as Jackson's dancers smoothly entered to music that could've been confused with a wave of silk or the wind

blowing through the Sahara dessert. On stage they gently leaped and landed into plies one by one, moving their arms and legs into various positions – arches, angles, darting and flowing upwards and downwards into the air. Their bare feet lightly ran back and forth on and off of the stage like butter. It was a calming number to start the show.

UDP performed a duet, displaying pure skill and precision, with their sharp, concise move-

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ments of arms and legs, slicing the air, sometimes in unison, sometimes individually, but always in sync whenever necessary. As they danced, it was conveyed in their every move that they had a passion for what they were doing. While the constant rhythmic pace of the African drums was heard, there were images of hands folding over, in, out, around and under with bare feet, pointed and flexed, stretching or kicking outwards – making shapes and figures as if imitating another creature.

The gifted 19-year-old Bermudian, Twanée Butterfield, graced the room as she sang at various points throughout the evening. The song she wrote, entitled 'God's Love Remains', was the highlight of her selected repertoire, as it sent such positive, empowering messages.

In the ballet section, both schools tickled the floor as they bouréed on pointe. Jackson's floated across the stage doing a series of steps, such as balancés, chassés, and pas de chats, to an up-tempo version of 'Canon in D major' by Pachelbel.

However, the dance could have had more variety. In tutus, UDP pleasantly surprised the audience dancing gracefully to the sound of African drums. There were pirouettes, pas de chats and pique turns, which, one by one or in twos, they performed confidently. Even the slightest synchronised head movement by the entire group was very effective. It was a treat to see male dancers included in the UDP group, as there are so few on the Island. One did a high split jump and at least a triple pirouette, if not more – it was excel-

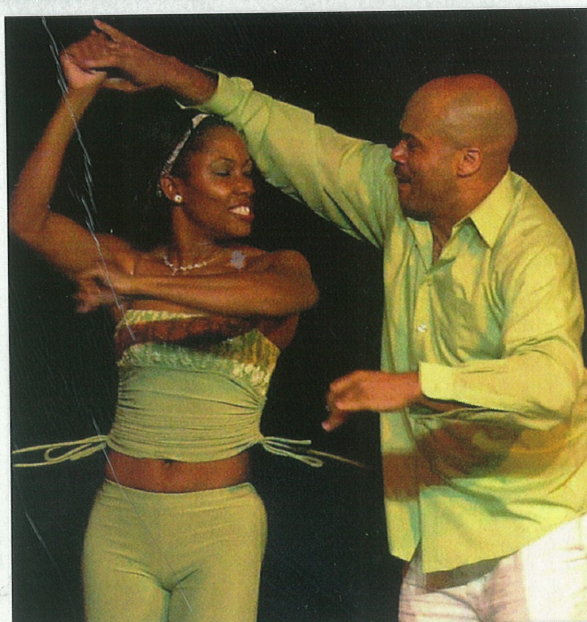
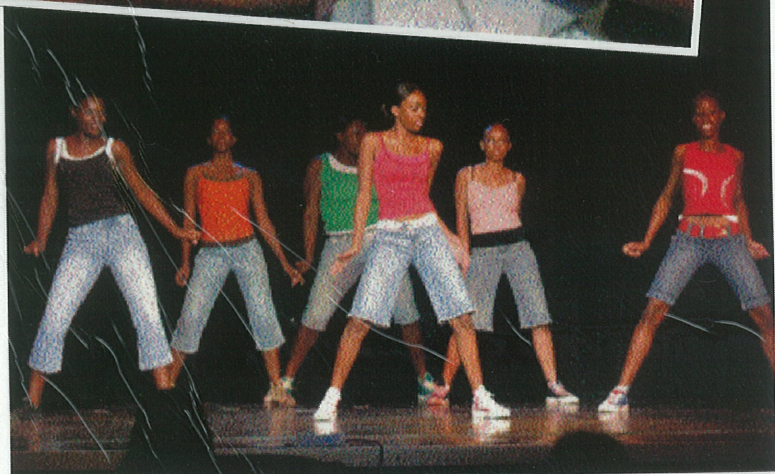
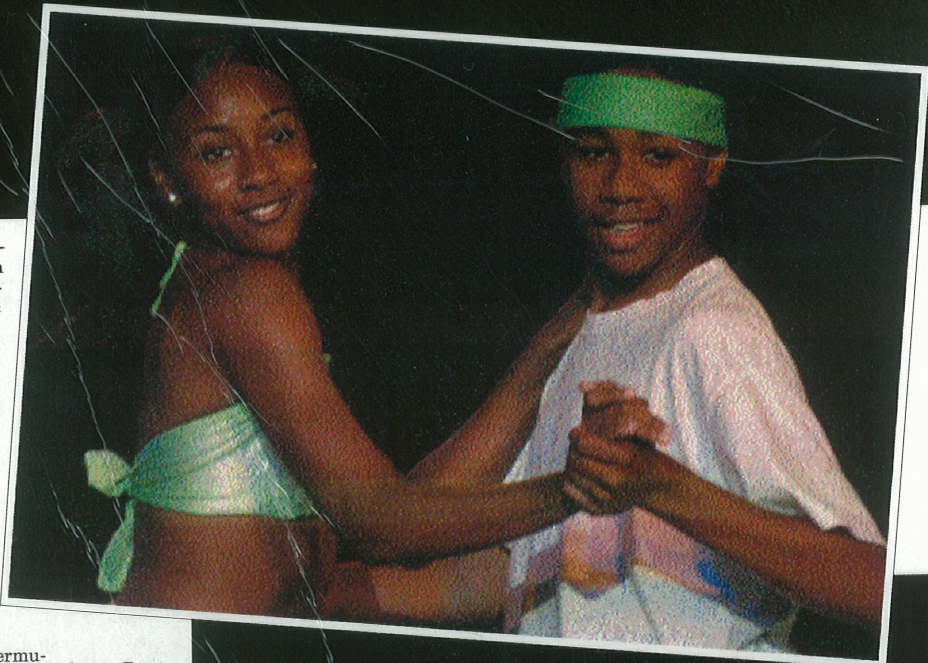
lent. Partnering also added a nice touch to the dance that was already filled with much creativity.

A 'Slamin' start to the second act was a tap number performed by UDP. Not missing a beat, they made the stage sing with their tap shoes! Dancing with such vibrancy and life, it gave one the urge to join them. They did a series of intricate tapping combinations, including wings, turns, shunts, cramp rolls, pullbacks and toe stands. (Unfortunately, there was no tap entry from Jackson's).

However, it was the hip-hop category that created the most excitement amongst the audience. Jackson's funky groove to Amerie's 'One Thing' and Missy Elliot's 'Lose Control', was performed with so much oomph – a real "You go girls!" dance. Their jean capris and colourful tank tops added to the funkadelic vibe.

A huge bang exploded when UDP did their routine to Missy Elliot's 'Lose Control'. The start was particularly effective, as they literally 'lost control', shaking rapidly on the floor. The entire group was in perfect timing, taking advantage of every beat, and beaming with gusto. Everyone, on and off stage, was having a blast, it was impossible not to!

The Sabor Dancers kick started the salsa category, a hard act to follow. In their duet perform-



Giving it all they've got: Clockwise from top, Twanée Butterfield, United Dance Productions, Jackson School of Dance, Sabor Dancers and Jennifer Hudson, left.

A singing, dancing spectacular

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The Sabor Dancers kick started the salsa category, a hard act to follow. In their duet performance, they showed a high-level of skill and professionalism. Wearing catchy lime green and white outfits, they danced to the intoxicating rhythms of trumpets and bongos that went hand in hand with their quick feet movements that flowed as if it took no effort. Their rather intricate and complex steps, which displayed flexibility, were carried out so smoothly, they merely tickled the floor.

Salsa Elegante, in black and silver attire, performed 'elegantly' like their name. Their gentle steps complemented the steady pace of the salsa music, generating a relaxing vibe throughout the audience. However, the dance lacked spark, particularly when the music changed to Michael Jackson's 'Bad'.

The last salsa act by 'Salsa Puro', was, indeed, an 'act' in that it was a mixture of drama and salsa to form a tasteful blend of comedy and dance - 'Steve Urkle style.' It was a unique, light hearted and entertaining piece of work.

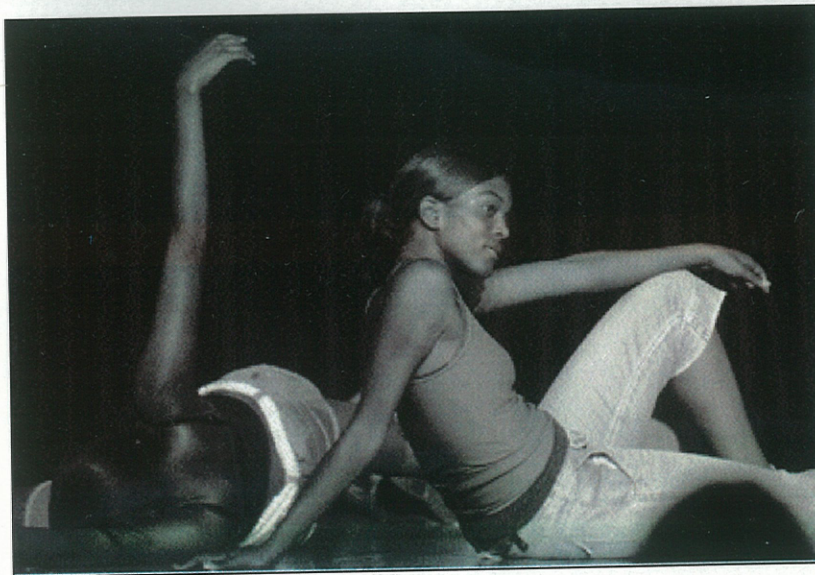
When Jennifer Hudson and George Huff performed they were absolutely amazing! Both have such a high range and held onto notes as if their voices grabbed them into a tight fist and gently released. George and Jennifer let their warm personalities shine through with a very spunky stage presence. They lit up the room and got the audience involved at every opportunity - George at one point bouncing off the stage and into the front row of the crowd, allowing a close-up of his rousing performance. Jennifer humbly giving one appreciative spectator a warm hug.

Their special message to the youth of Bermuda was to follow and believe in your dreams because the sky is the limit.

Programme producer Kevin Bean expressed his gratitude to all those who supported the event. It was stressed that the purpose of the occasion was to benefit the youth of Bermuda. He said, "I think it's a great event. This is the first of a three part success series."

The prize winners were Sabor Dancers (\$1,000) who competed against two other salsa groups, while, amongst the dance schools, United Dance Productions placed first (\$4,000) and Jackson School of Dance received (\$2,000) for second place.

'Dancing for Success' was certainly a spectacular and positive occasion, the kind that is a shame to miss. In closing, the beautiful combined voices of, Twanée Butterfield, Jennifer Hudson and George Huff sang, 'Ain't No Mountain High Enough'. A perfect way to end a great evening.



Salsa Elegante, above, Jackson School of Dance, far left, and American Idol contestant George Huff, left.