

Caribbean Fusion will bring dance and music to APL for Black History Month

Charlene Hines loves to dance but, for her, it's about more than moving her body to the rhythm. Each beat is evocative of the history of Black Canadians, their journey, and is also an opportunity to teach and learn.

This has been a driving force behind the DOAHL Academy, a Markham-based dance studio run by Charlene and Gregory Hines, as well as the force behind a presentation that will take place in the Aurora Public Library's living room space on the afternoon of February 13 to mark Black History Month.

‘It’s the secret to why we overcame such adversity,’ Charlene Hines tells *The Auroran*. ‘It’s what got us through really tough times? singing, clapping, stamping our feet, moving, it’s what kept us unified, it gave us hope, it’s what gave us strength and it continues to be a driving force behind the Black community.’

‘In Black History Month, which I feel should be every single month because there is just so much to learn, it’s obviously a heightened time when people’s ears are opened up and their hearts and mindsets are a bit more focused on the Black community, what we have to say and what we have to educate them with.’

The Aurora Public Library strives to ‘celebrate our diverse community throughout the year and you never want to limit it to just February for Black History Month,’ adds Reccia Mandelcorn, Manager of Community Collaboration for the Aurora Public Library, who reached out to DOAHL with an idea.

‘I found through all my years of programming that nothing brings a community together as much as food and music,’ says Mandelcorn. ‘It doesn’t matter what your origins are or what culture you come from, these two things are building blocks that help us learn, cultivate and grow as a community. I was thinking we would do something fun and special to celebrate Black History Month and I thought about programming a dance performance, followed by a community workshop, that would get us all moving to the rhythms I personally love.’

Moreover, she adds, it was important to find a Black-owned and operated dance studio to make it all possible, and that’s how she connected with the Hines.

From Mandelcorn’s perspective, their mission emphasizing the power of dance to bring communities together and share culture was perfectly ‘in sync’ with APL and, as the program has developed, excitement has kept pace.

The program set to be offered next month is Caribbean Fusion, which will showcase a variety of dances that are emblematic of the rich diversity of that region of North America.

‘It is really important to us that with every performance that we are educators,’ says Hines. ‘I find that we hear music and can sometimes clump them into one category. It’s important to know the differences between Reggae and Dance Hall music, your Calypso music versus Soca, and even traditional. Even with traditional you have so many different countries and elements, so we will be bringing work from West Africa.’

The power of dance to bring people together was always evident for Gregory and Charlene.

Her interest in African-Caribbean dance can be charted back to the age of three. It was something she grew up with, and her interest subsequently expanded to include Hip Hop, which was at the initial core of DOAHL.

‘We were trying to bring it to a more professional level in Canada [as] it was already that way in the States,’ says Hines. ‘We had to do something different here in Canada. When we opened up the dance studio in 2003 or 2004, it was really about having a voice in York Region. It wasn’t until performance opportunities started to open up in different spaces that were interested in what we had to

offer that I really started to see the impact on other communities and how interested they were and how dance and movement unified us.

?I look at these opportunities as opportunities to be seen, to be heard, to be accepted ? for everyone in that room to see that we are the same ? the same but, again, different cultures because of where we come from, but the same in the sense of just having the same vision, the same wants. We want this for our entire country, our entire world, but in our community, which is York Region, a more fused vision of our diverse country. That is what Canada is all about and I would love to see that more within our communities.?

Caribbean Fusion will take place in the Aurora Public Library's living room space on Saturday, February 13, at 3 p.m. and all are encouraged to attend. Come in comfortable shoes, says Mandelcorn and, if your footwear is less than sensible, you can simply take them off and take part in your socks or bare feet.

The event is free, open to all ages, with no registration necessary.

By Brock WeirEditorLocal Journalism Initiative Reporter