

African art form as a motivator

Capoeira is an African-Brazilian Dance and part martial art, which Ismail Douglas uses to teach discipline and self-respect to



children in the Cleveland Municipal School District. Douglas also teaches at the Rainey Institute, and recently at the Passport Project, Inc. Cultural Arts Center. Douglas holds a bachelor's degree in History and Religion from Cleveland State University, and his study of history is how he first became acquainted with Capoeira. He has been studying and performing for more than eight years.

Douglas is also a practitioner of Tai Chi and has studied with both Master Tom Haung and Michael Frost, and he studies Yoga as well. He also plays the guitar, and performs a Latin-Jazz group (Rumba Tabaco y Café) and the Alamar Band. He has performed at events such as The Cleveland Orchestra's "Star Spangled Spectacular," Charles Davis and the African-American Dance Ensemble at the Allen Theater Dance African Dance at the International Children's Games, just to name a few.

Capoeira has its roots embedded deep in the African and

Brazilian cultures. Brazilian slaves of African decent developed it. Since it was illegal for slaves to practice fighting skills, they altered native African religious dances so that when they practiced their art, they would appear to be dancing. Capoeira is today the most acrobatic of all martial arts, with many kicks being executed from a handstand position. Tai Chi is a Chinese form of martial arts with a central concept that the mind, body, and spirit must work together to defeat an enemy. Yoga's main philosophy is that the mind, body, and spirit are all one and cannot be clearly separated. Rumba Tabaco y Café, [Jam Session, Tobacco, and Coffee] which puts you in the mind of a street filled with open windows in any Latin American neighborhood where each wind blows out to the street a different mixture of sounds. All of these art forms and disciplines aid Douglas in his efforts to assist children with growing pains from adolescence to adulthood.

"I'm doing something every day that pertains to my art. I'm

always studying. I don't use the arts for the sake of arts. I use arts as a form of self-expression, discipline, self-respect, cooperation, and focus. The classroom requires you to stay focused," Douglas said. "Out of that you can produce the highest good. It's a process. It doesn't happen overnight. Any art form reflects the people [who created it]. It exposes the children to different cultures around the world."

According to Douglas, Capoeira teaches one a lot about the human body.

"Capoeira requires you to be upside down a lot, in inverted positions. You are learning body dynamics, and you must be agile and flexible," he said. "Capoeira is also about communication. How well you communicate, how can you express that through movement; how to take an idea you have in your mind, and make it manifest through your body. I'm a strong advocate of health, of taking care of the body. I teach a violence prevention program with the assis-

tance of a music instructor, a music therapist, and another female instructor. It works because they can see it in action."

For his efforts in teaching our children, Douglas received the Liberty Bell Award from the Cleveland Bar Association in 1994, and was featured on the ABC nationally televised "Power of One," hosted by actor Malik Yoba in 1997.

Douglas can be reached at (216) 926-5908 or at the Dance Studio located on Lee Road.

This has been your weekly look into DNA Level C, and I hope you have found it informative and enlightening. Until next time, this has been your link to Cleveland's Underground with "G Styl". If you would like to showcase your talent or venue in a future article, please feel free to contact me at GStyl@GStyl.com or (216) 235-9803. If you have any feedback on the column, please feel free to contact me at Promos@GStyl.com or the editor at Showtime@BuckeyeWeb.net.

'Big River' is homecoming for Cleveland native and Tony Award Nominee Michael McElroy

One of Cleveland's own is coming home as Playhouse Square Center announces that Broadway veteran Michael McElroy will give

his Tony Award nominated portrayal as "Jim" during the Cleveland engagement of "Big River," The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn.

McElroy wowed Broadway audiences last year with his portrayal of Jim, the runaway slave from Mark Twain's book "The

Adventures of Huckleberry Finn" and subsequently garnered a 2004 Tony Award nomination in the Best Performance by a Featured Actor in a Musical category.

McElroy worked alongside a Tony Award-winning ensemble cast that includes deaf, hard-of-hearing and hearing actors performing a synchronized ballet of speaking, signing, gesture, song and dance. Spoken English and American Sign Language are interwoven with music, dance, and storytelling techniques from both hearing and deaf cultures into a "third language" creating a unique and groundbreaking theatrical experience.

McElroy grew up in Shaker Heights and graduated from Shaker Heights High School. His family plays a prominent role within the local community; his Grandmother worked closely with Congressman Louis Stokes for years and his grandfather started Harvest Missionary Baptist Church in Cleveland. McElroy credits his church upbringing to his founding and continued direction of "Broadway Inspirational Voices," a multi-racial gospel choir comprised of Broadway performers.

"Big River, The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn" is based on one of the greatest creations in American Fiction, Mark Twain's classic "The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn." This tale of adventure and self-discovery begins on a raft on the Mississippi River in




Michael McElroy

the 1840s, where Huck, escaping from his drunken father, meets up with Jim, a runaway slave. The story of their journey downstream is an American classic that captures the rhythms, sounds and spirits of life on the big river.

The original production of "Big River" opened on Broadway on April 25, 1985 at the Eugene O'Neill Theatre and was the winner of seven Tony Awards including Best Musical, Best Book and Best Score. The musical numbers include, "Do You Want To Go To Heaven," "Waiting for the Light to Shine," "Muddy Water," "When the Sun Goes Down in the South" and "Worlds Apart."

"Big River, The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn" will be at Palace Theatre in Playhouse Square Center for 16 performances, Nov. 30 through Dec. 12. For information, go to playhousesquare.com or <http://www.playhousesquare.com>



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