

IN MEMORIAM

Remembering Alice Dinizulu (Ohema Afua Owusua)

Nearly fifty years ago in Michael's Rehearsal Studios on Eighth Avenue, a select handful of black dancers made a firm commitment to African dance, at a time when it was not popular to be interested in Africa or things African. These people were the cornerstones of African dance. They kept it alive and watched it rise out of the embers of almost extinguished flames to become the course of choice when courses on black and minority studies were introduced into academia in the late 1960s.

It was in the walls of these rehearsal studios that I met Alice Dinizulu. Alice had danced with Asadata Dafora, an African from Sierra Leone, who is credited with re-introducing African dance into the United States in the twentieth century. His most popular work was *Kykunkor*. Alice taught classes for Dafora in his later years when he was too ill to do so. She also studied with Joe Comadore and Ismay Andrews. Alice married Gus Dinizulu and together they immersed themselves in the Akan culture of Ghana. They had three children who were raised in the culture, with Kimati becoming an accomplished African musician. Gus acquired the title Nana Yao Opere Dinizulu, and Alice acquired the title Ohema Afua Owusua—both titles signify royalty.

It saddens me to say that Alice Dinizulu passed away on March 3, 2007. She was an icon in the world of African dance and a powerhouse of knowledge. As we all know African dance, for the greater numbers, is

still an oral tradition that is handed down from one generation to the next by a mouth to ear process. Alice held within her head a warehouse of African dance from its earliest existence in the United States. Although she imparted many things, she never committed her story to the printed page. When she died, personal information that only she knew and could tell went to the grave with her. Her death was untimely, and she did not want to go: there were plans in the offing to return to Liberia to re-investigate Fanga, Alice's favorite dance. She had also planned to write her story for an issue of *Traditions*. But time ran out before she could put her thoughts on paper. As members of the Council of Dance Africa, we rode together. Our conversation always centered on Africa and things African. We reminisced about our many trips to Africa and the things we learned. Alice was in agreement that we should write our own history, as much of what we read in books was not accurate. The best way we can honor Alice is to finish writing the book on our culture.

Alice was more than a friend to me. She was a wonderful and kind person who kept an open mind. She was supportive of Africa and things African. She was also a warehouse of knowledge. Anytime I needed to verify a fact, I could always telephone Alice and she would corroborate the facts. Alice wore many hats: she was a mother, sister, wife, and grandmother to her family; an outstanding member of the community; a teacher; and a

cherished member of the Council of Elders of Dance Africa. As a member of the Council of Elders, Alice took great joy in seeing the increasing number of people participating in African dance. Today there are a number of families that have dedicated themselves to African culture. African dance has come a long way from the time Alice started. Although it has come a long way, Alice would be the first to say that it still has a long way to go. She wanted the young generations to know that it was a long uphill struggle to get African dance into the curriculum. There were times when we would discuss and reminisce about those days—how we were not welcomed on college campuses. The colleges went to great extent to limit the black popu-

lation on their campuses. York College was created to reduce the black population on the campus of Queens College, and Medgar Evers was created to eliminate the black population on the Brooklyn College campus. It was a long hard battle, which ended in a number of successes.

As the heavens open to receive the body of Alice Dinizulu, we know that her spirit will still guide us from above as we travel on the road of life. Thank you for all that you gave us and the wealth of knowledge you shared with us. Rest in peace Alice. We will miss you. Alice is buried in Zion Grove Church Cemetery, Highway 705, Eagles Springs, NC.

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