Hillside High’s Future Artists

Photographic Essay by Ray Tyler

The arts are essential to every child’s education, but at Hillside High School, the arts are a way of life. It’s an arts program that has shaped the lives of numerous N.C. Central University students, including two NCCU alumni standouts, Denise Pantiel, ’07, and Renee Clark, ’06.

Derek Pantiel, the first NCCU student ever to be elected president of the UNC Association of Student Governments, said Hillside’s arts program changed his life. He said he was going to be a mechanic, but after participating in the arts program, he decided to attend NCCU. He was elected to the UNC A.S.G. in 2006. “It taught me how to find my weaknesses and turn them into strengths,” said Pantiel. “It challenged me to see my talents not just on the stage, but in the community.” Pantiel is now a graduate student at the Ohio State University of Pedagogical Medicine.

Former 2005-2006 NCCU Student Body President Reese Clark also said Hillside’s arts program instilled her profoundly. “The Hillside High School Performing Arts Center taught me more than dance, music, or theater. It taught me about life,” said Clark. “If not for the HHS Performing Arts Center, I would not know that it is possible to overcome struggles,” she said. “I definitely would not have known that passion cultivated by creativity, love and hard work manifest great- ness.”

HHS’s performing arts department, led by Xavier Cason, Paula Nunn, Nicole Oxendine and Wendell Tabb, is arguably the most celebrated department at Hillside. It has won numerous awards and accolades. Cason, an NCCU alumna, has been the band director at Hillside since 1997 and was selected for “Who’s Who Among American Educators.”

In 2006, Cason was awarded the R.C. Power’s “Real People” Award and selected for “Who’s Who Among American Teachers.”

Choral director Nunn has taught music with the Durham Public School system for 17 years. She has been choral director at Hillside for five years. Oxendine, a Hillside alumna, has been a dancer for 14 years and teaching at Hillside for three. She also is a performer and choreographer and has been a member of Ribrele Repertoire Dance Company, Sacred Fire Worship Dance Troupe, and Hillside’s Advanced Dance Team, and was a guest performer at the American Dance Festival in 2005.

NCCU graduate Wendell Tabb has worked as drama director and teacher for more than 25 years at Hillside. He has directed more than 40 plays nationally and internationally. Tabb has performed in several NCCU dramatic productions, including “Two Trains Running,” “Tannen” and “Heart Is Heart, Ain’t Your site Worth Swing?”

He was awarded the 2006 James E. Shepard Sertomas Educator of the Year Award, and the Black Living Legend Educator award. Asked about the impact of the arts on the students, Cason said, “Music is the soundtrack to these students’ lives.”

He explained that music and creativity are the fluid that connects students to their culture and environment. He said that the arts can provide the first steps to greatness.

Hillside High student Demanee Richmond hits a high note on the trumpet.

Student Teacher Anthony Pierce, an NCCU alumnus, teaches vocal music band class.

Wendell Tabb illustrates the key points of a script to a tentative student.

Above: Hannah Reese takes her turn in a classroom switch jump exercise.

Top: NCCU Alumnus and Hillside High band director, Xavier Cason shows students marching techniques.