

***Article written by Samantha Meddnick June 9th, 2007
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Fatawu Sayibu wants to live his dream. He wants to make a career out of traditional African dancing; an almost impossible feat if you ask most Ghanaians. Yet this 25-year-old powerhouse isn't asking for advice.

Born into a drumming family in northern Ghana, Fatawu was raised through music. He started dancing at the age of four and today is the most talented and respected dancer in the northern region and leader of the N'angba Cultural group.

"When I dance I feel alive. I like to see other people dancing and share my passion with them." And that's exactly what Fatawu's been doing for over 20 years.

His only source of income and a minimal one at that, dancing is Fatawu's life. In his small dance studio, comprised of a concrete floor and cement walls, next to his house, Fatawu teaches the children of Tamale for free. He believes it is one of the most important things children in the north can do to help keep them occupied and off the streets.

The money he makes comes from performances he does with the other 29 members of his dance troupe. They perform across the country and occasionally internationally and even though Fatawu spearheads the group, for each show he makes no more than 3 Ghana Cedis (less than \$4 U.S.)

However this is anything but a deterrent and in order to fuel his career Fatawu has started giving private lessons and workshops to residents and tourists in Tamale eager to experience a piece of Ghanaian culture.

"I know people who have made their living from dancing. It's not possible now in Ghana but in the future I want to create my own group abroad and come back to Ghana and take care of my people here."

And it has been this positive outlook and energy that's been flowing

through Fatawu since his father gave him a drum when he was a child. Dropping out of school when he was eight to pursue the career he began at age 4, Fatawu taught himself the incredible art of traditional African dance. He went back to school at 15 so he could learn English in order to increase business and further his career.

“People think dancing will not benefit them here in Ghana. It’s not something they can use to take care of themselves. But I’m trying to keep this culture alive.”

A culture that Fatawu says has slowly faded over the years with people beginning to pursue more economically viable options and learn useful skills that can support a family, rather than involve themselves with traditional practices.

Yet Fatawu strongly believes that dancing is the key to keeping his people together and is determined to make it happen.

“Some things you have to stick out. Dancing is what I love and I will continue to work at it until I can earn a living from it support the Children in the north as well.”

(Samantha Meddnick is an accomplished Canadian Journalist who worked for JAZZ Radio station in Tamale for a period of seven months; this article will be published in a local newspaper in August 2008 when she returns to Canada (contact satoji@yahoo.com))