

2-25-2019

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In the dance/performance program, students learned from and collaborated with artist in residence, hip hop artist and breaking practitioner Raphael Xavier, ultimately showcasing their work in a final performance.



February 25, 2019 | Kindell Brown and Julia Rubin

**BRISTOL, R.I.** – In the basement of the performing arts barn, music blasted. Sneakers tapped against the wooden floor and then kicked the air. Arms lifted and glided. Fingers snapped.

“Use your hands to move you through the space,” said Raphael Xavier, the dance/performance department’s artist in residence, from the front of the studio.

When the students weren’t spinning and kicking, all eyes were on Xavier. He demonstrated moves like the kick-step, the kick-cross, the easy spin, the kick-rock. The students practiced in rows, and then partnered up to prepare their own combinations of movements.

Xavier, self-taught professional hip-hop dancer, breaking practitioner and guest lecturer at Princeton University, worked with RWU dance/performance students for the week. In conjunction with the strong foundational dance education, the program brings in 2-3 artists per semester, with varying backgrounds and dance aesthetics, as part of its artist in residence initiative.

**Raphael Xavier Artist in Residence**



“It is critical for developing dancers to work with a diverse pool of artists, within various creative processes, as it replicates the professional world,” said Cathy Nicoli, associate professor of dance and performance studies. “Dance has always been, and still is, a very communal form, needing much kinetic and intellectual interchange.

Xavier and the students worked together throughout the week in studio classes and rehearsals. The culmination of the residency was Xavier’s solo show and a collaborative dance performance that he and the students created together.

The experience of working with a professional dancer is beneficial in multiple ways. It helps students learn new technical skills and develop their own expressions. It also helps them build experience and connections for future performing arts careers.

“Many of our students have gained professionally from our guest artist program,” said Nicoli. “All graduate with many more influential lines on their resumes - and many make lasting network connections, which have resulted multiple times in not only solid advice and good recommendations, but also jobs and lasting professional advance.”

Additionally, working with a professional in the arts is inspirational, and shows them that they can indeed find success if they work hard and follow their passions.

When asked what advice he would give to people looking to pursue a career in dance, Xavier said, “You have to find the thing that works for you, stick to it, stay on it, and go for it.”

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