

THE EXPRESS-TIMES

Hip-hop's Harris receives state honor

Friday, August 24, 2007

By **SUSAN KALAN**

The Express-Times

Dancer/choreographer Lorenzo "Rennie" Harris -- a familiar face to dance and theater students on both Lafayette and Muhlenberg college campuses -- has been named Artist of the Year for the 2007 Governor's Awards for the Arts.

Harris, artistic director and founder of the hip-hop dance company Rennie Harris Puremovement, based in Philadelphia, will be among recipients at the awards ceremony Oct. 4 at the Majestic Theatre in Gettysburg, Pa.

The awards honor artists, arts organizations and patrons of the arts in Pennsylvania for their excellence and achievement.

Philip Horn, executive director of the Pennsylvania Council on the Arts, which manages the Governor's Awards, says his agency has supported Harris in his work for many years.

Horn says being named as a recipient of the Governor's Award is "very powerful. It means your home state is recognizing your contribution to the community."

The awards ceremony site varies from year to year. It was held in Allentown in October 2001 at Symphony Hall and was Gov. Tom Ridge's last public appearance in that capacity before being named to direct Homeland Security in Washington, D.C., by President George W. Bush.

Ellis Finger, director of the Williams Center for the Arts at Lafayette College in Easton, says Harris has performed five times on campus.

"Each time, Harris has delved into new areas of creative discovery," says Finger. He describes his work as "hip-hop aesthetic, with a raw, visceral energy rooted in social dances from the clubs and streets of Philadelphia."

Using this core style, Finger says Harris' dance performances are "often even spiritual."

Finger says Harris' first full-evening work at Lafayette, "Rome & Jewels," was inspired by Shakespeare's "Romeo and Juliet" and the Jerome Robbins dances from "West Side Story." He says he adapted sections of the dialogue to street-wise slang and dialect.

His second work, "Facing Mekka," was produced by Lafayette as world-premiere performances of an epic account of black identity, as rooted in African culture and religions, including Islam.