

Maritime Centre for African Dance

Chad Lucas



Paul Adams

Mufaro Chakabuda

Five years ago, Mufaro Chakabuda was ready to pack her bags.

The native of Zimbabwe was considering either a return to her home country or moving on to Montreal for further studies. But a recurring question kept her in Halifax.

"I was teaching some dance classes at the YMCA, and people kept asking me, 'Where else do you teach?'" Chakabuda says.

Out of that question, the Maritime Centre for African Dance was launched. Chakabuda likes to say that she started the business with just \$20: the cost of renting space for her first lesson.

"It sort of grew from there," she says – which is a major understatement.

Less than five years after she launched MCAD in the spring of 2005, Chakabuda has taught dance classes and workshops from coast to coast and performed for some illustrious audiences. She was honoured in

November with a 2009 Women of Excellence Award from the Halifax chapter of the Canadian Progress Club.

Not bad for a business idea that garnered plenty of skepticism when Chakabuda first pitched it. "There were a lot of naysayers, because the idea of an African dance studio was so foreign to a lot of the people I presented it to," she says. "They thought it just wouldn't fly here."

Despite the doubters, MCAD has flourished – even more than Chakabuda perhaps first expected, and "not without lots of pressure and stress," she admits.

Weekly dance classes are now the smallest part of the growing centre, which also offers cross-country workshops, summer camps, hip-hop dance competitions and a DVD series.

Chakabuda's studio employs a network of 13 drummers and 10 instructors. She has crossed the country giving workshops, including one in Vancouver last summer that drew 500 participants.

Chakabuda also travelled with four other dancers and two drummers to Washington to perform at U.S. President Barack Obama's historic African Inaugural Ball in January, which was the highlight of a lifetime, Chakabuda says.

"It was also very nerve-wracking, because there were people there from the (African) continent who knew the traditional dances and would know if we screwed up," she says with a laugh. "But there are no words to describe it. At the end of the performance we had people coming up on stage and dancing with us. Everybody was dressed in traditional outfits. It was beautiful."

The Maritime Centre for African Dance draws on a wide range of styles and influences from across the continent, including Zimbabwe, Gambia and Ghana, among others. Chakabuda credits its popularity to what she sees as a growing curiosity about other cultures.


"I think it's becoming such a global world," she says. "People are interested – 'What is this culture all about? It looks like more than what I see on TV.'"

For Nova Scotians of African descent who visit her studio or take a workshop, it's often about connecting with their own roots.

"They come in and say, 'I want to learn my heritage. I want to learn my culture and what it's all about,'" Chakabuda says.

She says MCAD's mandate is so much more than just teaching dance steps. She and her instructors do plenty of presentations in schools, especially during African Heritage Month.

"We feel our role is really to be ambassadors of the continent," she says. "We're in the business of cultural education."

The Maritime Centre for African Dance is on the web at: www.mcafricancamps.com 

A graphic with a green background and a yellow wavy border. At the top is a yellow stylized logo of a person in a dance pose. Below it, the text reads: "Maritime Centre for African Dance", "Mufaro Chakabuda", "406 3280, 225-9267", "afrikandance2005@yahoo.ca", and "www.mcafricandance.com".