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## **Dancing to diversity: Hepcats performance will pay respect to Big Band Era**

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The chance to stand where the greats once stood does not come around very often.

For performers in Friday's multicultural show at the Lyric Theatre, they will get to do just that with the conclusion of the monthlong Cultural Diversity Festival.

"When the Hepcats were asked to perform, it was a no brainer," Mike Richardson, an instructor at the Hepcats Swing Dance Club, said. "Not only was it an opportunity to pay respect and homage to the Big Band Era, but also a chance to dance at a facility where the great performers performed in the past."

The Lyric Theatre, which was recently renovated and reopened in October 2010, was the center for entertainment in the late 1940s and early '60s for African American families in Lexington, according to the Lyric's website.

Anna Edwards, the event's subcommittee chair, said the theater has great significance for the African American community.

"People of color were able to see other people of color performing on stage and could go through the front door," Edwards said.

"Just to perform on that stage, like the greats, (where) some of those greats performed on," she said. "It's invigorating to the performers themselves to have that experience at the Lyric. It just heightens our awareness of diversity and applauds our diverse experiences and the diverse talent."

The Hepcats' performance group, the Rhythm Cats, is just one group that is performing, and will perform two original swing dances from the 1930s and '40s, Richardson said.

"There's other groups that represent the diversity of arts around the world — I think that's a really good reason to come out to the event," Richardson said.

There will be a variety of acts from music to spoken word to dance, said Thessalenuere Bernard, a member of the event subcommittee and co-emcee of the event.

The featured performer is J.J. Kent, a Native American award-winning folklorist, Edwards said.

Other performers include Whit Whitaker, James Capman of the band Boomerang and The Lewis Mimes. Acts include children doing traditional Far and Near East dances and a traditional belly dance.

“No matter what your cultural taste, there is something there for everybody,” Edwards said.

She also said the subcommittee is excited about the variety and expertise of the performers.

“One of the most universal of all things is that of music and dance and the arts,” Bernard said. “And so it will provide the opportunity for all of us to be together in one place to share and again respect and appreciate our similarities and our differences.”

Bernard, who is not originally from Kentucky, said being on the subcommittee gave her the opportunity to learn about the different groups represented on campus as well as different events.

“I think that it has broadened my awareness of what’s available on campus,” she said. “I want to make sure that the community understands that these events we have are for the community. Not just for us, for the community that we live in, the community that surrounds, the community that will sustain the theater and the community that will sustain the vibrant diversity that we have in this city.”