

# AMBASSADORS OF LIGHT

## BYU-Idaho Dancers Perform Throughout Peru and Ecuador

By Don Sparhawk

Radiating the light of the gospel wherever they went, 42 students from BYU-Idaho won't soon forget this past summer's dance tour to Peru and Ecuador.



The audiences embraced the young American dancers wherever they performed on their 24-day May tour that attracted an estimated 30,000 spectators.

The Dance Alliance team flew to Quito, Ecuador, where they boarded a bus for visits to Guayaquil, Cuenca, and Machala in Ecuador and Piura, Chiclayo, Trujillo, and Lima in Peru.

Artistic director Shawn Fisher said this was not a typical tourist trip and little time was provided for shopping and sightseeing. Instead the service tour sometimes involved as many as three dance performances a day. This proved to be both fulfilling and exhausting to the group.

"I have been on three tours and had a pretty good idea of what to expect," said David Baird, a senior biology major from Idaho Falls. "But I was totally blown out of the water by how incredible this trip was.

"We were touched by so many people and were able to touch so many people," David said. "We built new bridges with political officials, humanitarian groups, and the Catholic Church. The value of these trips cannot be expressed in dollar terms. I am a better person because of what I have seen and done in South America."

David added, "One of my greatest highlights during the tour was at an orphanage in Peru. The facilities were poor, but very well taken care of. The night we danced to raise money for this orphanage, the little children sat on the front row. You could see the charm in their eyes as they watched us dance. I hope we inspired them to seek beauty in their own lives."

The performances were arranged by local Church leaders who worked closely with nonprofit organizations to turn the shows into fund-raisers for various causes.

In Piura the Church joined with the local Lions and Rotary clubs to raise funds for a small village—coincidentally called "the city of Noah"—that had been heavily damaged by a flood. The money was to be used to build a commissary to feed the displaced residents.

The dancers had the opportunity to visit some of the people of Noah. "It was a very touching moment," said Scott Bergstrom, the tour manager. "Students got to witness firsthand the effects of a natural disaster on a people."

The students handed out leftovers from their lunches to the women and children. Tears were streaming down the students' faces as they watched the appreciative recipients slowly savor the sandwiches that were nearly thrown away.





In Guayaquil proceeds from a performance were given to a nonprofit organization striving to rescue children from the strong influence of gangs.

Whitney Kriser, a junior elementary education major from Mapleton, Utah, said, “Most of all, I grew to love the people of Peru and Ecuador. It was awesome to perform for those beautiful people and then go out into the audience and meet them after each performance.”

Although there was a language barrier, Whitney said “that enabled the language of the Spirit to be even stronger so we were able to share our love and testimonies in a more deep and meaningful way... We were privileged to rely more on the Spirit to carry our testimonies of the gospel to the people, and I believe that was accomplished as we did our part to be worthy and do all that we could.”

A mutual kinship developed. Joshua Hawkes, a sophomore business major from Ashton, Idaho, recalled saying goodbye to their two bus drivers at the tour’s end in Lima. “Vinzenta started telling us something and immediately his face softened and he began to sob,” Joshua said. “He told us how much he appreciated being with us and considered us his children. He said we were unique and that he had never had another experience like this one. He asked us to excuse him for his imperfections and wanted us to know he loved us. It was so tender. The entire bus was in tears because the spirit was so strong. It was the most intense feeling of the spirit I felt the entire trip.” SM

