



The Citrus Dolls, Syracuse University's first Majorette dance team, sits down with Renegade Magazine.

Welcome to the Dollhouse

Photos by Jocelyn Guzman

Written by Jade Pennyman



Meet the Dolls

Cheila Martinez

Choreographer and Co-Founder of Citrus Dolls
Senior, Sociology major and Philosophy minor

Penda Diop

President and Founder of Citrus Dolls
Senior, Psychology Major

Karri Stewart

Public Relations Officer
Freshman, Law Society and Policy Major

Chandler McCoy

Sophomore, Magazine, News, and Digital Journalism

Breauina Williams

Freshman, Accounting Major

Aniyah Jones


Sarah Ishmael

Q: What does Citrus Dolls mean to you?

Cheila: It's a revolutionary impact on what it means to be a minority student at a PWI. It's an outlet, it's an escape, it's a movement because what we're doing here is not commonly done.

Q: What is the Origin Story behind the creation of the Citrus Dolls?

Penda: What prompted me to start this was the fact that a lot of girls, including myself, were discouraged with joining the cheer team and dance team because of how there was a lack of diversity, and I just wanted to have an aspect of HBCU culture in Syracuse University because going to a PWI it's hard to feel like you belong as a black individual, especially as a black woman. So, I wanted a space where women could feel comfortable and feel like they could express themselves.



Penda: I texted Cheila because I knew she was really passionate about major-ette too, and I was like, would you like to make history and she was down and has been committed with me ever since.

Q: What do you guys do to help you prepare for a performance?

Cheila: "I've been dancing for a long time, and this is my first time choreographing. And I really wanted to challenge myself so each time we do something completely new, new moves, new steps, all of that. I'll spend fifteen hours plus in the studio a week, whether that's by myself or doing group rehearsals, one-on-ones. I really accommodate everyone else's schedule because I'm really passionate about making sure everyone is executing the routine. I really value excellence. In this past month, I've really seen these girls grow a lot, not only their dance skills but just their confidence and their character. We support each other during practice and we root each other on. That makes it fun."



Q: What can the culture do to uplift and celebrate black voices and organizations in unity?

Karri: I think Majorette is really good at getting people involved. It starts from not only us getting to know each other but also the music that we pick, usually comes from black artists. We could use black creators and talent when we're dancing to their songs. History and tradition like the moves. Some of the core values of majorette, like, flexibility, those things are things that we have learned and have been demonstrated from people before us, so all of that culture comes into it, and I think that's what makes it beautiful and unique. In terms of things we can do currently, I feel like we're making our best effort to involve other organizations and add on to their legacy as we create our own, but I also think there is a lot of potential for us to interact with other black students, creators and artists. Even people who aren't black or people of color can learn and be a part of our culture as well as be immersed in what we have going on.

Q: Can anyone be a Citrus Doll?

Penda: Anybody can be a Citrus Doll. When I started this, I wanted it to be an inclusive dance team; that's why I wanted to do it. I felt like the dance team and cheer team weren't inclusive. Even if you're a guy, you can be a Citrus doll too, so everyone is welcome.

Q: Any advice for anyone interested in Majorette dancing?

Chandler: I would say literally just do it. When I connected with Citrus Dolls through Instagram over the summer, it was kind of like me going back and forth, but then just deciding to do it was the best step I could have taken because I feel like it's opened up a lot of doors for me and made me meet people I wouldn't have met otherwise. I think having the confidence to do it is the first step.

Karri: My biggest piece of advice would be coachable. You can come in not having all of that experience, but if you're coachable, you can learn, you know how to ask good questions and pay attention, you can pick things up, and that comes to any new routine, piece of choreography, stand, or whatever. So, being coachable and being humble when someone corrects you, just take the correction, don't try and argue or give an excuse, but if Cheila is going to take the time out of her day to critically look at me it's because she wants it to look good and it's never going to be a correction that is not to the benefit of you.



*"Have confidence.
Unleash your inner majorette,
your inner diva."*

Breanna: As a freshman coming in, you're thinking, omg, you're not gonna be able to do anything, all the upperclassmen are not going to want to speak to me or anything. They're honestly so sweet, and I feel like if there is something you want to do and you have interest, go for it because you don't know where that's gonna take you or who you're going to meet with it, so be open to trying new things.

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Penda: My biggest advice is to never give up no matter how many people tell you no, no matter how many people discourage you, keep going. Because when I started this org, so many people were like, you guys aren't going to perform at games, you guys aren't going to go far, and I had trusted in myself, I trusted in my intuition, and I just didn't give up, and I believed in myself. Always believe in yourself; don't let others stop you from doing what you want to do.