



Fall for Dance with Ron Brown, Alvin Ailey and others

Zita Allen | 9/12/2013, 2:17 p.m.

It's that time again—time for the Fall for Dance Festival, New York City Center's annual offering of showstopping performances by a dazzling mix of familiar favorites and new faces. Now celebrating its 10th anniversary, the program kicks off with two free nights at Central Park's Delacorte Theater, Sept. 16 and 17. Following on Sept. 25 through Oct. 5 is a showcase of 20 acclaimed artists from around the world in Fall for Dance's traditional venue, City Center Theater, with tickets costing only \$15.

The Delacorte performances pay tribute to the historic Public Theater's Dance Festival with performances by Ronald K. Brown/Evidence, the Paul Taylor Dance Company, Elizabeth Streb's Streb Extreme Action Company and New York City Ballet.

The two-week City Center Festival consists of five unique programs and includes performances by Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater, American Ballet Theatre, Ballet Hispanico, Dance Theatre of Harlem, 605 Collective, Les Ballets Trockadero de Monte Carlo, Nrityagram, Richard Alston Dance Company, Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui/Sadler's Wells London, the Royal Ballet and more.

Recently, I caught up with Ron Brown to talk about his contribution to Fall for Dance. Brown is a brilliant choreographer whose Brooklyn-based company, Ronald K. Brown/Evidence, has won international acclaim since it was founded back in 1985. In fact, he electrified audiences during the festival's first season years ago. This season, Fall for Dance audiences will see Brown's "Upside Down," an electrifying piece created in 1998 and set to the music of Malian vocalist Oumou Sangare's "Kun Fe Ko" ("The Uncertainty of Things"), a song that says the destiny of a child is in God's hands, and Fela Anikulapo Kuti's song "Upside Down."

While Brown's dance is an excerpt of a larger work, "Destiny," it captures both that work's essence and its creator's generous spirit and choreographic signature—a seamless mix of traditional African dance and contemporary movement. It also reflects an amazing artistic journey. It has a mix of



influences that include his mother, teachers Mary Anthony and Anna Sokolow, Alvin Ailey and more. It also reflects a seminal drive to, as he said, “tell my grandmother’s stories” while allowing audiences to connect with his work and the dancers performing it.

“I hope that when people come to see ‘Upside Down,’ they see people on stage,” Brown said. “When I started working on a larger piece of which ‘Upside Down’ is a part, AIDS was ravaging the community. In fact, during its creation, one of my young dancers died.” In many ways, Brown said, the dance is a tribute to those who’ve gone before us and the heritage they’ve left. “We must honor that heritage. Let’s not take traditional dance that came from the continent and make it into something that takes the spirit out of it.

“For me, what I think I’m trying to do is make contemporary folklore, because within folklore are lessons of how we should be and treat each other. That’s where I feel my role is in dance—connecting it to something else that’s not brand-new or not just demonstrating what we’ve learned but to something deeper. Our culture is not just supposed to be, ‘Look, I can dance. I can turn.’ So what? I want to know why are you turning?”

For Brown, dance or movement reinforces the importance of community in African–American culture and acquaints audiences with the beauty of traditional African forms and rhythms. Even as his company, Evidence, now tours to some 30 communities in the United States and abroad and reaches an audience of more than 25,000 annually, participating in the Fall for Dance Festival is important because it deepens his connection to a larger community. That’s what makes Fall for Dance so special. Thanks to choreographers like Brown, it allows audiences to do just that—fall for dance!

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Accessed at 5:29pm on 9/19/2013