

Camille Brown's *BLACK GIRL: Linguistic Play* Is a Captivating Hour of Dance, Beats, and Chants

by [KATY KOOP+](#) • MARCH 9, 2017



N.C. State LIVE presented Camille A. Brown & Dancers in *BLACK GIRL: Linguistic Play* at 8 p.m. on Saturday, Feb. 25th, in Stewart Theatre in N.C. State University's Talley Student Union in Raleigh

If I could compare [N.C. State LIVE's](#) Feb. 25th presentation of [Camille A. Brown's *BLACK GIRL: Linguistic Play*](#) to anything it would perhaps be [this scene](#) from the 1950 film *Summer Stock*. Like [Gene Kelly](#) investigating a creaky floorboard and an abandoned newspaper, Brown takes it further to delve into the sounds and feeling of recess on a blacktop.

Inspired by [Dr. Kyra Guant's](#) book, *The Games Black Girls Play: Learning the Ropes from Double-Dutch to Hip-Hop*, Brown takes the "unspoken rhythm and language that Black girls have through [Double Dutch](#), social dances, and handclapping games" to delve into "the dimensions of Black girl joy that cannot be boxed into a smile or a grimace, but demonstrated in a head tilt, lip smack, hand gesture, and more."

[Camille Brown](#), expands the concept of investigating surroundings into a captivating hour of dance, beats, and chants. Brown, along with **Beatrice Capote**, **Chloe Davis**, **Teneise Mitchell Ellis**, and **Catherine Foster**, convey that joy through Double Dutch, the "Jig-a-low," learning and imitating dance on television, and even dancing through thrown and stomped-in clouds of chalk.

My favorite moment is when two of the dancers, in front of this beautiful mural of colorful chalk illustrations, dance in it, rubbing their clothes through the drawing. With every move you see more color from the black top on them. Each dancer has unique movement and character; and together the ensemble takes you back to the rhythm of your own childhood, even if the story they are telling is not

your own. Brown and her dancers make their mark on Stewart Theatre in NCSU's [Talley Student Union](#), spreading the marks of chalk and drawings all over the space.

In particular, I was in love with the set design by **Elizabeth C. Nelson** and the lighting design by **Burke Wilmore**. When the light hit the hanging mirrors just right, the audience could see a bird's eye view of each of the dancers, as if they were watching children play on a blacktop from the school building. It was such a cool perspective to see the adult dancers and then from above, as if they were children.

The vibrant lights, including one that gave the blue glow of a television, helped create a stunning environment for each of the dances. Some of my favorite moments were when you could see the giant shadows of the dancers reflected on different sides of the audience. In addition, the use of what I can only assume was a fog machine, helped create that smoky effect of sun on asphalt.

More than anything though, the compositions by the pianist **Scott Patterson** and electric bassist **Tracy Wormworth**, along with the audio recordings from the sound design of **Sam Crawford**, were absolutely stunning. Piano, bass, and audio of chants and playground duels combined with the sound of dancing created a mesmerizing experience.

Every element of the production is a celebration and a snapshot of childhood play and an expression of joy that I haven't seen on the stage in a long time. [Camille Brown's](#) "gift to [her]self and Black girls everywhere" is also a gift that you should give yourself, no matter your background. To experience the joy yourself, watch [Camille A. Brown & Dancers](#) play.



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