



Review: ‘Black Girl: Linguistic Play’ at The Kennedy Center

by [Jane Franklin](#) on December 2, 2017

A lone bass guitar player, Electric Bassist Tracy Wormworth, is highlighted in a stream of light. He is seen at a distance and the sound is like a fluttering thought, familiar but quickly dissolving in thin air. A slim and very small figure enters. She moves in front of a large black board filled with multiple chalk images. The drawings are part graffiti, part sidewalk art; a collage in stream of consciousness. The drawings remind of those made in a school notebook, doodles or etchings that come about while sitting in a long lecture or waiting way too long, an escape found by a restless hand.



Photograph courtesy of Glitter Beast Culture.

Moments of play come and go. The dancer moves, and the intricate rhythm stands out, multiple waves of isolation, multiple body parts, moving, acting and reacting to one another. The rhythms are insistent and driving, the body leading the sound, with the electric bass performed by Tracy Wormworth, and piano performed by Scott Patterson, as a second line. Several elevated platforms by Designer Elizabeth C. Nelson provide complexity to this playground. An amplified platform accentuates the rhythms of syncopated stepping, tap and hand-clapping games. Chalk dust rises, dispelling in the air similarly as the sound, underscoring improvisation and musicality.



This is choreographer Camille A. Brown performing in *BLACK GIRL: Linguistic Play*. Drawing on fragments of African-American social dance, movement can quickly dissipate, or rise to a new level with a friend in play. Juba dancing calls on the quick conversation in movement, the hand-clapping intricacies matched by the waves of a spine, the limbs shadowing the complex rhythms that come from the heart. The juba was passed down over generations originating from Haiti or West Africa; a dance devised by slaves, the hand-clapping a result of a ban on drums. Two dancers enter in to this game, feet and legs firing quickly. At one moment they grasp hands, facing one another. The next moment, one changes, and they both face the same way, back to front. This continues in multiple configurations, and then singing rises up. Images of jump-rope games and the complete bliss of finding a friend trigger joy in their connection. Handclap /Nursery Rhymes “Miss Mary Mack,” “Miss Susie Had a Steamboat,” “Green Sally” brings isolated shout-outs from the crowd, the audience quickly drawn into the community.



Photograph courtesy of Glitter Beast Culture.

Performers Beatrice Capote, Chloe Davis, Catherine Foster, Fana Fraser and Brown deliver on movement from cultural traditions and social dance with gestures and body language from the vocabulary of today. In one segment, two dancers come to a moment of disagreement; their bodies pressed to the black board, swipes of the hips diminish the drawings. At another moment they sit silently. Flickering light suggests a television. The two are simply drawn together soundlessly in a shared moment.

The piece modestly communicates so much in the very slightest of gestures or interactions. One dancer sits on the floor, her partner behind her plays with her hair. That experience of



trusting a head to someone else's hand is the most intimate of moments, shared between mother/child, and by partners in relationship.

BLACK GIRL: Linguistic Play is a masterful examination of play and communication, intricate movement and sublime subtlety. The interaction isolates to one-on-one, and is constantly changing, just like the chalk dust that rises then resolves. The small gestures, the turn of a head, the flick of a hand, and the relationship of one dancer to the other, and we understand. Everyone may interpret these passing moments differently, but the will to find a community is an experience we can share.

Running Time: 48 minutes with no intermission.

BLACK GIRL: Linguistic Play, played on Friday, December 1, 2017, at 8 p.m. in The Kennedy Center's Eisenhower Theatre – 2700 F Street, NW, in Washington, DC. For tickets, call the box office at (800) 444-1324, or purchase them [online](#).