

Girl Power

Camille A. Brown & Dancers makes a stunningly impactful TITAS debut with *Black Girl: Linguistic Play*.

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Photo: Kirk Richard Smith

Dallas — Just in time for school to start, **Camille A. Brown & Dancers** take us back to childhood with *BLACK GIRL: Linguistic Play*. Presented at Moody Performance Hall, it's the season opener for **TITAS** and kicks off an eclectic year of old favorites and exciting premieres.

Brown's Dallas debut brings a few other unique aspects. It's a female-directed and choreographed company (as is becoming the trend with **TITAS**), and the entire five-member cast (including Brown) consists of all women. Pianist Justin Ellington is the only male on the stage during the performance, as he and bassist Robin Bramlett (another relatively uncommon facet, a female bassist) deliver an exceptionally timed score with mostly original compositions, plus a few others. Despite the culturally specific title, the show depicts themes common to most girls growing up in pre-Snapchat America, regardless of race or ethnicity.

Another major characteristic of the evening is the noticeably short runtime of the choreography, with the Q&A (or "dialogue," as Brown puts it) seamlessly following the performance. After a production that lasts just under an hour, Brown—who choreographed three world premiere musicals at Dallas Theater Center: *Stagger Lee*, *Fortress of Solitude*, and *Bella: An American*



Tall Tale; and also choreographed the Tony-winning revival of *Once On This Island*—and the backstage crew quickly transition to a talk-back before the audience knows what’s happening. Even though some patrons exchange a few awkward glances, as it’s a habit for TITAS artistic director Charles Santos to signal the post-performance discussion while people are leaving, Brown’s accessibility and openness to talk demonstrates her enthusiasm for two-way communication regarding her art.

What comes out of it is not only a glimpse into audience reaction but also some validation concerning our own interpretations and a confirmation of the excellence portrayed on stage. Out of the many relatable images displayed, the creative choreographic and rhythmic structure presented, and the stunning passion conveyed, the one thing that stands above the rest is the show’s clarity, in Brown’s choreography and the dancers’ execution.

Large platforms cover the stage, with the dimly lit musicians in the upstage right corner and a large, intricately sketched chalkboard in the upstage left area. The first section consists solely of Brown for about 10 or 15 minutes. Time seems to fly, as her deliberate gestures, expansive movements, and facial expressions completely captivate. Pedestrian maneuvers morph in gestural phrases, which then transition to social and percussive dances. Rinse, lather, and repeat, but never does it become dull, always illuminating and real.

That progression continues with the entrance of Catherine Foster and a more energetic display of friendship with Brown. Platforms serve not as spaces to contain, but rather points from which to fly as they leap across and off them with ease. The two engage in handshake and clap games, with increasing stomping and impressive soft shoe tap dancing.

About halfway through, a new set of characters emerge, as Alia Kache and Chloe Davis illustrate a close sisterhood challenged by the realities of growing up. Their choreography presents the most athleticism overall and the most narrative variances. The discoveries and transitions from youth to womanhood create misunderstanding and what seems like a broken relationship. Davis actively works to repair the bond, and reaches out to a hurt Kache. Brown’s later comment describes it best. “We fight hard, but we love harder.”

The final segment depicts a touching moment between mother (Brown) and daughter (Yusha-Marie Sorzano). Sorzano executes the most dynamic range, as her choreography takes patrons on a journey through the life of a girl. Quick, scrambling movements epitomize the frenzy of exploration while her mother tries to do her hair. Tentative, frustrated gestures show the tension of finding her own voice while under her mother’s watchful eye, but they return to a devoted playfulness before the daughter becomes the caretaker in a final, poignant picture.

Perhaps it’s the small cast or the minimal musical accompaniment, but despite the massive energy exerted and tremendous power displayed, the show delivers a soothing, mellow quality with an introspective ambiance. It’s at once mighty and hushed. **TJ**