

DANCE REVIEW

To the Sounds of Stevie Wonder, a Dance Baptism for a New Theater

Ronald K. Brown Dancers at BRIC House in Brooklyn



Andrea Mohin/The New York Times

Ronald K. Brown's Evidence From left, Soloman Dumas, Maresa D'Amore-Morrison and Shayla Alayre Caldwell performing "Gatekeepers" at the newly opened BRIC House in Fort Greene, Brooklyn.

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[BRIC House](#), the snazzily redesigned headquarters of BRIC, the venerable Brooklyn arts organization, opened last month, but it wasn't until Wednesday night that the building's flexible performance space had its first dance show. There couldn't have been a better first choice than the Brooklyn company of [Ronald K. Brown](#). This is dancing that consecrates. The warmth and artistry and infectious joy made this house into a home.



Andrea Mohin/The New York Times

Ronald K. Brown and Anniq Roberts in "On Earth Together."

The program, combining Mr. Brown's 1999 "Gatekeepers" and a slightly revised version of his continuing Stevie Wonder project, "On Earth Together," was nearly identical to one the company presented at the Joyce Theater [last year](#). But the differences between the two theaters go beyond BRIC's being half the size of the Joyce. The sightlines from its raked seating are compromised — fellow viewers' heads obstruct dancers' feet — and the

stage area is awfully shallow. It's not ideal for dance.

Nevertheless, Mr. Brown's choreography and his radiant company enlarged the space. "Gatekeepers" is about preparing a safe path. Though the dance has a cast of only six, when those six were cycling in and out of one wing, doing the bucking leaps and open-hipped swivels of Mr. Brown's kinesthetically irresistible, African-based style, the impression was of plenitude. As the six smoothly divided and combined, the stage was so alive that its size hardly mattered.

Using the songs of Mr. Wonder for "On Earth Together," Mr. Brown draws upon an artist whose talent, skill and spirit allow for gestures and statements that would be unbearably naïve and sentimental in other hands. In this way, musician and choreographer are counterparts. The intention of the work, Mr. Brown explains in a program note, is "making the world a better place."

Lyrics, especially Mr. Wonder's, increase the danger of literalness. But Mr. Brown skirts that pitfall with his craft. The handcuffing of a man in the drug arrest of "Living for the City," echoed by two other men, is turned into a dance motif. That motif and others — a gorgeous swooping into a hovering balance, a hands-up that's both defensive and spiritual — keep reappearing in different settings, different moods, expressing communal mourning, individuals alone in boxes of pain or person-to-person difficulties. Like Mr. Wonder, Mr. Brown earns his joy by peering into darkness.

Last year at the Joyce, an array of singers rendered Mr. Wonder's songs live. The BRIC performance settled for recordings, which I preferred: Nobody sings Wonder like Wonder. The other difference was the incorporation of more than a dozen community volunteers, ages 8 to 77, part of BRIC's community engagement project.

These volunteers exacerbated some of the work's structural bagginess, upsetting its balance between tight construction and low-pressure dance-party grooving. Each time they flooded the stage, it felt like a finale. All the same, the sight was beautiful. The prospect of all of Brooklyn dancing like Mr. Brown's company is a glorious idea of community service.

Ronald K. Brown's Evidence dance company continues through Sunday at BRIC House, 647 Fulton Street, at Rockwell Place, Fort Greene, Brooklyn; 866-811-4111, bricartsmedia.org.

This article has been revised to reflect the following correction:

Correction: November 19, 2013

An earlier version of the schedule information with this review misstated the last day of performances. They continue through Sunday, not Saturday.

A version of this review appears in print on November 18, 2013, on page C7 of the New York edition with the headline: To the Sounds of Stevie Wonder, a Dance Baptism for a New Theater.

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