

## Camille A Brown and troupe let their feet do the talking

BY GRANIA MCFADDEN – 24 OCTOBER 2014

Dance fans have been impatiently tapping their feet - possibly literally - while awaiting the arrival on stage of Camille A Brown and Dancers.

Festival is hosting the European premiere of the company's Mr. TOL.E.RAncE, which this week won a Bessie award (the dance world's equivalent of an Oscar) for most outstanding production.

Camille A Brown knew she wanted to be a dancer when she was just three years old. She used to practise in front of videos of Michael Jackson, and perform his moves in her living room.

But music also plays a prominent role in her work. She uses her background as a clarinettist to inform her choreography, combining music and movement into a fresh form of storytelling.

"For me there is no separation in my understanding of choreography. I move seamlessly between music, theatre and dance," she said.

The New York-based dancer has been telling stories from a black female perspective since she formed her company, Camille A Brown and Dancers back in 2006. "I'm fascinated with tying history to my personal experiences and bringing those to life."

Camille's stories are based both in the distant past and the present day, her aim being to draw a connection between then and now. Life is not a history lesson, she maintains, but rather a journey. The past informs the present, and influences the future.

Mr Tol.E.RAncE is inspired by Mel Watkins' book *On The Real Side: From Slavery To Chris Rock*, along with a Spike Lee movie, and the show looks at comedy, race and stereotypes. It explores what it was like to be a black performer through the ages, and looks at the modern-day minstrelry which exists, and how black people are represented in the media. "This work is the most courageous work I've done," said Camille.

If it all sounds a bit heavy-going, fear not. There's comedy, animation and soul-stirring live music from pianist Scott Patterson - everything from ragtime beats to pop culture.

Dancers perform hip-hop, vaudeville and tap against projections of some of the most famous and influential roles and images of black entertainers.

"It's a human story," Camille said. "We all have to smile when we don't want to. We all wear a mask. We are all perceived differently than how we really are."

And she'll be talking a lot more about the show during her post-performance talks in The Mac tonight and tomorrow.