

With Eloquent Arms, Movement Gives Voice to Visceral Images Ronald K. Brown's Evidence Company Performs at BRIC

By **BRIAN SEIBERT** NOV. 7, 2014



Pictured: Coral Dolphin. Credit Andrea Mohin/The New York Times

Ronald K. Brown's dance company, Evidence, is presenting "One Shot: Rhapsody in Black and White," which draws on Charles Harris's images of black life in mid-20th-century Pittsburgh, at BRIC House in Brooklyn.

There are certain givens in a dance by [Ronald K. Brown](#). Deep, spiritual seriousness. A sophisticated mastery of stage space. Music that makes you want to move. A vocabulary, drawn from many parts of the African diaspora, that Mr. Brown has developed into a personal language that's flexible, richly expressive and irresistibly kinetic.

What varies, within a fairly narrow range, are the subjects and the structure. Or rather, the basic structure doesn't vary — most of Mr. Brown's dances are episodic — but the parts fit together in different ways.

On Thursday, he and his company, Evidence, began a run at BRIC House, in Brooklyn, where they are midway through a three-year residency. Of the two repertory works on the first program, "Order My Steps" (2005) has the clearer structure.

It's about submitting to God's will. That's the plea of the title and in the lyrics of the Fred Hammond song that accompanies the plaintive opening solo. Then the work opens up, with more dancers passing through to Bob Marley's "War." The war is internal, as is explained by the third section's spoken text, a redemption story by Chadwick Boseman about the false religion of drugs.



Keon Thoulouis performing at BRIC House. Credit Andrea Mohin/The New York Times

That text, which Mr. Brown has sometimes left out, fixes the dance's meaning, but that directness is balanced by the group representation of internal struggle and the unusual music that accompanies it: a moaning string quartet by Terry Riley. After that, the return of Marley — "Exodus" — and the fit with Mr. Brown's steps do feel like redemption.

"One Shot: Rhapsody in Black and White" (2007) is more of a puzzle. It draws on the photography of Charles Harris, many of whose images of black life in mid-20th-century Pittsburgh are projected behind the dancers. The photos are invariably compelling, but the seven sections of Mr. Brown's work are organized less by groupings of the Harris oeuvre than by a diverse array of musical selections connected to the city: Billy Strayhorn, Mary Lou Williams, Lena Horne, Phyllis Hyman, even Cuban rap and the Guinean drums of Mamadouba Mohamed Camara.

With the music and the costumes (church robes, 1940s garb, military fatigues), Mr. Brown reverently evokes the world of the photos, but the order seems too random, jarringly shuffled. Certain gestures thread through: the straight, L-shaped arms that the dancers lift with pride in church or as picket signs of protest or with joy in love. Mr. Brown's duets here are romantic with almost no touching.

Annique Roberts and Clarice Young are particularly delightful in those duets, catching the innocence in Harris's shots of children. But they are always striking, standouts in a company of wonderful dancers that was, on Thursday, captivating a half-empty theater. When Mr. Brown is in residence, BRIC House ought to be full every night.

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

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