

Review: Brown, Evidence troupe celebrate community in Benedum show

By [Mark Kanny](#)

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Successful performing arts are community experiences, at minimum, between the audience and those onstage.

Ronald K. Brown and his modern dance troupe Evidence forged a strong bond with what looked to be a capacity audience at the Benedum Theater, Downtown, on Feb. 6. His themes and the way his dancers brought them to life created an uplifting experience.

The program began with “Come Ye,” created in 2002 to music by Nina Simone and Fela Anikulapo Kuti. It is a call to those living in fear and willing to fight, but has peace as its goal. It is much more about assertion than combat.

Brown treated the five women and three men who danced “Come Ye” as individuals on the same road, a community of sorts. His dancers have distinctive faces and a variety of body types. None is anorexic or super buff.

His choreography was a constant delight, uncommonly fluid and filled with delightful surprises, such as an unexpected accent from a thrown elbow.

Brown revels in a rich texture, sometimes clearly delineated into solos in the foreground, an active mini-chorus to the side and a less active third level in the rear. But he especially loves eight dancers moving independently and coming together in various combinations for a spell. Even in the fourth section of “Come Ye,” a diagonal line dance, the performers move in the same direction but without the line being formed with the strictness one encounters in ballet.

The first half also included a short solo by Brown called “Through Time and Culture,” which he created in 2014. His flowing and seemingly relaxed style included dancing close to the floor. The piece ends with a gesture of hope and generosity.

The second half was devoted to “On Earth Together,” a 50-minute piece in which Brown performed with his eight dancers. It was created in 2011 to 10 songs by Stevie Wonder and expresses Brown's aspiration for us to live as compassionate citizens of the world.

In the first section, set to “Living for the City,” conflict soon arrives with flashing police lights and dancers held in custody on the ground, which is followed in the next section by urban gunfire and all the dancers decimated.

Community builds in ensuing numbers, culminating in “Don't You Worry 'Bout a Thing,” in which two dozen Pittsburgh dancers join the Evidence troupe. The local dancers ranged from children to seniors of various races. They were chosen by audition and very effectively rehearsed by Brown.

For all his focus on community and its struggles, Brown's dancers retain their individuality. Even so, when a traditional family came together — mother, father, boy and girl — the audience responded enthusiastically.

“Jesus Children of America” provided the high-spirited conclusion. In it, Brown remains true to his vision. Evidence dancers were joined by all the Pittsburgh extras in a celebration of freedom, because, for Brown, community does not mean conformity.

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