

Camille A. Brown & Dancers bring gutsy moves and virtuosic musicality to The O'Shaughnessy stage

THURSDAY, 19 FEBRUARY 2015 15:14 CARMEN ROBLES

Camille A. Brown, dancer-choreographer along with fellow performer Mora-Amina Parker from the New York Based Camille A. Brown & Dancers, graced the KFAI studios Tuesday morning on Conversations with Al McFarlane to talk about their week-long dance company residency here in the Twin Cities.

The company's community outreach component, Black Girl Spectrum, presents in Minneapolis through a workshop with Lovin' the Skin I'm In, a nonprofit focused on providing uplifting programs for young African-American girls.

The residency includes four student matinees, a classroom visit, an open rehearsal for junior and high school students, a master class and the February 21 public performance. It should be noted our very own Robin Hickman community leader, activist, innovator, CEO and Executive Producer of SoulTouch Productions is founder and curriculum developer of Lovin' the Skin I'm In.

A Women of Substance event, The O'Shaughnessy and Ordway Center for the Performing Arts co-presents the acclaimed dance company, which will perform excerpts from the regional premiere of the Bessie Award-winning "Mr. TOL E.

RAncE," (The Bessie Award in honor of Bessie Schonberg, are awarded annually for innovative achievement in dance and related performances, particularly so-called "downtown" performances); the Midwest preview of "Black Girl: Linguistic Play" and "New Second Line."

Camille A. Brown, originally from Jamaica, Queens is an only child who was influenced at an early age by her mother's love for musicals. Brown recalls going to the library and choosing musical videos that left her mesmerized and influenced her future. Competing in a male dominated field, Brown never dreamed of becoming a choreographer as she didn't have black female role models to emulate. She had to create her own path and credits following her passion to honor her roots through storytelling with dance and music as the stepping stones to acclaimed career as a dancer and choreographer.

"As a dancer, history and lineage continues to live through you. Not only are you taking in the world around you you're taking in the world that you grew up in as well" said Brown. "Even though they are no longer here physically their energy is still here, they are my ancestors".

Mora-Amina Parker a native of San Francisco, California and a graduate from San Francisco School of the Arts has performed with various dance companies, such as Savage Jazz Dance Company, Robert Moses' Kin, Dallas Black Dance Theater, Jeanne Ruddy Dance, and Philadanco. Parker recently became a certified classical Pilate's instructor and is celebrating her third year working with Camille A. Brown & Dancers.

One of the greatest joys for Parker is the opportunity to have conversation. While taxing and exhausting after a performance, Brown thinks it's very important that there's dialogue, to have an intelligent experience. "Regardless of what people think we can sit down and have a conversation" said Parker. "Take out the rage and have honest discord."

"Telling my truth is my contribution to the world, I stay true to me by taking ownership of who I am" said Brown. "Sometimes it's the illusion that prevents you from doing your gift, continue to be yourself. You never know what the situation will bring. It's about the human experience.

The Camille A. Brown and Dancers uses high theatricality and the aesthetics of African, ballet, contemporary, tap and social dances to tell stories that connect history with contemporary American culture. Camille A. Brown & Dancers' work explores typical, real life situations ranging from literal relationships to more complex themes with an eye on the past and present making a personal claim on history, through the lens of a modern female perspective.

"Dance is universal" says Brown. "A lot of times when people think dance they don't think it's accessible to them. Hopefully through social dancing and through dialogue we can present dance in another way. Dance is something that's more accessible, that's concrete something that they've done before because dancing is also gesture. When we talk about politics we incorporate gestures within a lot of our politics, Hands Up is one gesture we all know. It's a universal theme I'm hoping to spread and hoping others will discover".

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