

## Review:

# Camille A. Brown & Dancers make magic

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### **Review: The New York dancer and her company brought magic to St. Paul.**

For the first time, New York-based company Camille A. Brown & Dancers arrived in the Twin Cities for a weeklong residency and a one-night performance as part of the Women of Substance series hosted by the O'Shaughnessy and the Ordway Center. The performance on Saturday night at the O'Shaughnessy included the first act of the company's Bessie Award-winning "Mr. TOL E. RAnCE," as well as a regional preview of "Black Girl: Linguistic Play" and a regional premiere of "New Second Line."

The program listed the performers in "Mr. TOL E. RAnCE" not as dancers but as "entertainers," an apt description given the piece's look at the roots of African-American performance in the United States.

The work seamlessly integrates projected elements, music and dance into something that is quite a marvel. Even when music and dance clashed at certain times, the work always felt purposeful.

The main question now is when Brown's company will return so we can watch the second half.

The piece began with a lengthy credits section, projected on the back screen, which included footage of tap dancers from early in the 20th century as well as bobbleheads of black celebrities through the ages.

As the show progressed, the video and still-image projections took a chronological approach, beginning with blackface performers and showing African-American performers through each decade.

At first, the dancers responded to these images with jerky, almost-robotic movements. There were elements of tap and musical theater, but the mood was frantic. The company danced while pianist Scott Patterson gave a masterful performance, but often the dancing worked against the music, creating an anxious, breathless feeling.

At a certain point, the lights came on. The dancers laughed and began to dance more in tune with the music, while images from "Diff'rent Strokes," "Amos and Andy" and "Good Times" were shown. Later, the "entertainers" rapped the theme to "The Fresh [Prince](#) of Bel-Air."

The regional preview of "Black Girl: Linguistic Play" was essentially a coming-of-age piece, looking at issues facing young black girls and women, exploring friendships, emerging sexuality and finding one's identity. There was a fantastic tap solo performed by Brown, as well as some wonderful jams by Tracy Wormworth on electric bass. To see Brown and Wormworth riffing off each other was magical.

The evening ended with "New Second Line," an exuberant piece that celebrated the ability of the people of New Orleans to survive.