

Review: Ronald K. Brown's Evidence Presents 30th Anniversary Season

By GIA KOURLAS FEB. 25, 2015



Annique Roberts, left, and Coral Dolphin from the dance company Evidence, performing at the Joyce Theater.

Credit Paula Lobo for The New York Times

Thirty years ago, a 19-year-old choreographer from Brooklyn decided to take a chance on himself. He formed a dance company called Evidence to pay homage to aspects of life that most people ignore until they hit middle age: family, teachers, faith.

It was a daring move, and it paid off: [Ronald K. Brown](#) specializes in a soulful, exuberant blend of African and modern dance that is rooted in spirituality yet refuses to become trapped in a sanctimonious place. Fittingly, for his company's 30th anniversary season, which began on Tuesday at the Joyce Theater, he closed the program with "[Grace](#)," an irresistible dance about a goddess who travels to earth, shares her grace with the people she meets and escorts them to heaven.

Originally created for Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater in 1999, "Grace" is enhanced by the serene power of the Evidence dancers, from the voluptuous fluidity of Clarice Young as the goddess figure to the pluck of Arcell Cabuag. The crowd cheered when Mr. Brown himself appeared. No two dancers move or look the same in Evidence, but the ever-elastic Mr.

Brown — grounded yet supple as his body spools circles around the stage — is the source of this earthy movement style.

The program also includes "Exotica" and "March" — excerpts from the 1995 work "Lessons." Revealing a vintage, more forthright side of Mr. Brown's storytelling, it feels choppy, especially when seen after "[The Subtle One](#)," a 2014 dance for eight featuring live music by the excellent jazz composer Jason Moran and his trio, the Bandwagon. This singular work — the title is a description of Allah — moves toward a meditative place.

For it, Mr. Brown was drawn to the last stanza in a poem by Alan Harris that begins: "So subtle are the wings of angels that you may not realize they've come and gone." Bringing those words to life are the choreographer's spiraling, swooping turns and moments of hushed stillness. Mr. Cabuag, Shayla Alayre Caldwell and the incandescent Annique Roberts spread their arms wide and lean back, as if opening their hearts to the sky.

Later, a chain of dancers, extending and pulling back their palms, exits the stage with sideways steps in which one foot brushes out to the side before crossing behind the other. Mr. Brown may have named this dance after Allah, but in this mystical, understated look at the human condition, he proves his maturity as a choreographer. He, too, is a subtle one.

Ronald K. Brown/Evidence continues through Sunday at the Joyce Theater, 175 Eighth Avenue, at 19th Street, Chelsea; 212-242-0800, joyce.org.