



4/21/15 O&A REVIEW: Philadanco- Having Our Say...The Voices of Women Choreographers

By Walter Rutledge

Philadanco celebrated the 45th anniversary of the company Friday, April 17 through Sunday, April 19 at the Kimmel Center for the Performing Arts. The program entitled *Having Our Say...The Voices of Women Choreographers* was an homage to the talents of female artists. The concert featured the work of four dance makers Diane McIntyre, Jawole Willa Jo Zollar, Bebe Miller and Dawn Marie Bazemore; and a tribute to performing artist, the late Mary Hinkson Jackson.

The program consisted of the two parts. Part I was aptly entitled *Generations* and offered two world premieres by veteran choreographer Diane McIntyre and emerging artist Dawn Marie Bazemore. These artists developed new works from different ends of the diaspora.

McIntyre's *A forgotten Moon-Song* inspired by the word "song" in August Wilson's *Joe Turner's Come and Gone*. It was a metaphor for an individual's highest essence. The work, choreographed in three sections, and set to an original score by William Catanzara with Jerome Morris, featured dancers Jasmine Beckles, Dwayne Cook Jr., Lalah A. Hazelwood, Roxanne Lyst and Jah'meek D. Williams.

McIntyre create a movement symbiosis that still allowed the dancers to retain individuality. The imagery had an abstract and cerebral quality, cool and textural with strong spatial references especially in the opening and closing sections. The more percussive middle section opened with a trio with Lyst and Beckles skillfully partnered by Cook. McIntyre captured the complexity and textural aspects of the jazz infused score with a commendable level of tranquility- this is a skill associated to an experienced artist.

The story of the Central Park Five gave emerging choreographer and Philadanco alumni Dawn Marie Bazemore the impetus for *A Movement for Five*. The work transformed the story of the incarceration of five black teenagers falsely accused and convicted in 1989 of rape into a poetic statement on injustice. The ensemble work for eight dancers featured Dwayne Cook, Jr., Joe Gonzalez, Lalah A. Hazelwood, Victor Lewis Jr., Allison MacDonald, Adryan Moorefield, Courtney Robinson, and Jah'meek D. Williams.

The opening, set to rap music from the period, expressed the freedom and exuberance of youth. As the work progressed Bazemore took us on a dark journey. The most gripping imagery occurred in *Section II: For Five*, the five men were in a semi-circle four laying on the floor facing upstage with their hands clasped as if handcuffed; standing center stage, Jah'meek D. Williams danced in a downspot expressing angst and futility.

The program's *Part II, Reflections*, presented three works from the company repertoire. Bebe Miller's *My Science* left the most to the imagination. The full ensemble work set to the music of La Voix and Led Zeppelin dealt with the collision of matter and the mechanic of relationships. The kinetic work's acquired taste probably needs a few more viewing to cultivate an appreciation.

Donald McKayle had the distinction of being the only Rooster in this choreographic Hen House. An excerpt of his (1959) masterwork *Rainbow Round My Shoulder* was one of the highlights of the evening. The solo, called "*Tribute*" to *Mary Hinkson Jackson (1925- 2014)* was a fitting eulogy to the late Martha Graham dancer, teacher and patron to Philadanco.

Performed with a poignant majesty by Courtney Robinson, the performance had a special significance because Hinkson had danced the solo.

The evening ended on a hand-clapping note with Jawole Willa Jo Zollar *Hands Singing Song*. The work explored the use of hands gestures, but it really was a statement on innovation, individuality and cultural pride of Americans of African decent. Zollar explores the rich cultural nuances from playful girl games, to raised fists of solidarity, to elaborate street corner handshakes. Each vignette combined wit and humor, and portrayed the subjects through a fusion of dance styles and music genres.

The performances acknowledged a remarkable milestone. It also acknowledged Philadanco's continued and sustained commitment. For over 45 years Philadanco has courageously offered the culturally underserved and artistically under represented a beacon.

Philadanco has a rich pedigree; it inherited its tenacity and tenacious resilience from the company's matriarch- Joan Myers Brown. Any celebration of Philadanco is an acknowledgement Brown. The two have become synonymous with uncompromising vision and inspiration. Happy 45th Philadanco and congratulations Joan Myers Brown!