

InfiniteBody

art and creative consciousness by Eva Yaa Asantewaa

Saturday, April 7, 2018

Uplifting Black choreographers: Gesel Mason



Gesel Mason
(photo: Enoch Chan)

Whoops!

Showing up 45 minutes into a concert because I, somehow, had the wrong curtain time just feels awful. More awful is when it's a historic, keenly-anticipated program like Gesel Mason's *No Boundaries: Dancing the Visions of Contemporary Black Choreographers*.

I missed nearly everything in the first half of the show--works by Bebe Miller, Kyle Abraham and Donald McKayle. <<sound of critic kicking self--hard and repeatedly>> I managed to slip in at a break to catch Rennie Harris's *You Are*

Why! (2014) and watch Mason dance the hell out of it alongside **Lisa Engleken** and **Mahayla Rose**. The second half featured works by **Jawole Willa Jo Zollar** (*Bent*, 2004), **David Roussève** (*Jumping the Broom*, 2005) and a piece by Mason (*No Less Black*, 2000) with her poetry and **MK Abadoo's** solo performance. This program has been fifteen years in development and represents both a tribute to a diverse range of Black choreographers and an ongoing gift to dance's future.

Happily, the entire program--a presentation of **Gesel Mason Performance Projects**, co-presented by **651 ARTS** and **RestorationART** at Brooklyn's **Billie Holiday Theatre**--will be accessible through the digital archive Mason plans to establish to preserve the legacy of Black artistry in dance. The documentation, just like the concert, will include personable video interviews of the choreographers, revealing the context for understanding how these artists saw and felt about their works when first created and how they view them now.

But try to get to the Billie Holiday tonight-- the show's final evening--for so many, many reasons. Among them is *Jumping the Broom* with its chilling imagery, prescient warning and the heartbreak of Mason's performance. In the short amount of time he allows himself, Roussève not only conjures vivid scenes in our imagination, he taps our empathy and our sense of foreboding. It is dance as an act of conscience, responsibility and courageous love.

Of course, I cannot speak of Mason's dancing in all of the program's pieces, but I do know she should rank high on your list of artists who jump into the fire of a work with the nimbleness and rigor to survive its flames. She's all up in the Zollar solo (an edgy, dissonant portrait of the extreme state of mind in addiction) and the Harris trio (with its unrelenting movement multiplicities upon complexities upon multiplicities). It's almost unbelievable that she would--and *could*--program demanding works like these two on the same bill as the Roussève piece. She says, now, that she will never do this again--herself, personally, though the works could be danced by others--and that much *is* believable.

But, for now--at least this evening--you've got a chance to see a great one at the height of her powers. *Go!*

For information and tickets to tonight's show (7pm), click [here](#).

The Billie Holiday Theatre

At Restoration Plaza, 1368 Fulton Street, Brooklyn
([map/directions](#))