

San Francisco Chronicle

Black Choreographers Festival review

By : [Allan Ulrich](#) Tuesday, February 19, 2013

In the midst of its ninth season, the Black Choreographers Festival is definitely not suffering from inertia. The project sponsors three weeks of concerts on both sides of the bay, and its curatorial policy does not impose any guidelines on the style of dance worthy of inclusion. Saturday evening's concert at [Dance Mission Theater](#) offered a comprehensive and moderately satisfying survey of new work from ballet to performance art.

The most stirring entry, [Camille A. Brown's](#) "The Real Cool," is a solo drawn from a larger work, "Mr. Tol.e.rance," which will come to [ODC Theater](#) in toto in November. The episode features a superbly wired dancer, [Waldean V. Nelson](#), who communicates the rage welling up in African American performers who must adhere to racial stereotypes to please white audiences.



The tone of the piece supplants anger with irony. His shadow projected like Bojangles', Nelson sports white gloves, flashes them in the audience's face, constantly smiles through gritted teeth, measures his motions, bows and struts. Then he takes the gloves off, and we transcend metaphor. Brown, a New York artist, generates considerable tension from immobility, and we sit through it with an air of expectation. The music via recording is a piano rendering of "What a Wonderful World."

Classicism was represented on the bill by "Au Printemps Romantique," a handsome premiere by [Gregory Dawson](#), who was once a mainstay of [Lines Ballet](#). Chamber music by Brahms propels this triptych of solos and small ensembles for five dancers. Nothing here is choreographically innovative, but Dawson knows the ballet language and uses it with taste and discretion. The highlight is a pas de deux for [Jordan Drew](#) and [Jeffrey Van Sciver](#), followed by an intricately plotted solo for Van Sciver, who shot across the theater like a meteor.

The second part of the program featured an odd performance piece, "Skin Talk, Skin Mood," created by and starring the Congolese artist [Byb Chanel Bibene](#), assisted by [Jeff Bennett](#) and [Chris Evans](#). A mixture of narratives on international racism and performance art tropes, this 35-minute opus revealed Bibene's theatrical appeal, while failing to produce a satisfying vehicle. The choreographer lost me when he solicited volunteers to be photographed seated on a prop commode.

The concert opened with the premiere of [Raissa Simpson's](#) "Shipyard Project: Something Leftover From the Last." An incoherent quartet for four women squirming and kicking on a small platform, the piece radiated much energy and little choreographic logic. The performers were [Jhia Jackson](#), [Adriann Ramirez](#), [Elizabeth Sheets](#) and [Katie Wong](#). The narrator's diction left everything to be desired.