

Pre-Quarantine Dancing: Black Choreographers Festival, Weekend 3

Sima Belmar Apr 6 2020

It didn't seem like COVID-19 was keeping anyone away from the Lisser Theater at Mills College on Sunday night, March 8, though it's hard to tell with concert dance. (Modern dancers in particular are used to performing for thin crowds.) The theater may not have been packed to the rafters, but attendance was good for the performance of the third weekend of the Black Choreographers Festival, now in its 16th year. More importantly, energy was positive and high and I didn't see anyone wearing a mask.

WE INTERRUPT THIS POST WITH A SPECIAL ANNOUNCEMENT FOR THOSE OF YOU LIVING UNDER A ROCK: IT'S TIME TO WEAR YOUR MASK!

Though it's been nearly a month since I saw BCF Weekend 3, a month involving new levels of brain befuddlement, I still remember many moments from the performance.

Jon Boogz and DJ Two Bears' short film *What Came Before* (2018): African American and Native American dance forms meet on a New York City playground. The dancing brings awakens the history of Manhattan through Black and Indigenous movement. Today, I'm imagining those encaged NYC playgrounds, usually full of play, vacant but for ghosts of movers past.



Jennifer Johns and dancers in Kendra Barnes' *Joy* — *The F.U.N. Manifesto 2020*, photo by Jason Hairston/JH Photography

Jennifer Johns dressed in sunflower yellow, belting it out during Kendra Barnes' *Joy* — *The F.U.N. Manifesto 2020*. Jubilant, space-eating movement.



JP Alejandro, Ashley Gayle, Kao Vey Saepanh, and Annie Aguilar in Raissa Simpson's *Motley Experiment*, photo by Jason Hairston/JH Photography

Le Jazz Cool as performed by JP Alejandro, Ashley Gayle, Kao Vey Saepanh, and Annie Aguilar in Raissa Simpson's *Motley Experiment*.



Chloé Arnold, photo by Jason Hairston/JH Photography

Chloé Arnold bringing down the house with her untitled tap performance — intoxicating antiphony.



Sade Bamwell, Charbel Rohayem, and Amelia Sampson in Gregory Dawson's Part II — Adagietto, photo by Jason Hairston/JH Photography

Two works by Gregory Dawson that demonstrated the ways Dawson has absorbed and reconfigured the sensibilities of his former choreo-boss, Alonzo King.



ArVejon Jones and Crystaldawn Bell In Robert Moses' Silt, photo by Jason Hairston/JH Photography

Crystaldawn Bell and ArVejon Jones in Robert Moses' *Silt* — *Excerpt*. I can still see Bell's gaze — simultaneously laser-focused and soft.

Black Choreographers Festival was the last live show I saw before the pandemic locked us in our houses. I remain buoyed by the memory of movement.