African-American dance troupes shine at ADF

BY ROY C. DICKS
CORRESPONDENT

Two African-American dance companies shared the stage at the American Dance Festival on Thursday night, in a striking contrast of old and new, intense and relaxed, structured and informal. Two pieces each from Dayton Contemporary Dance Company and Evidence, A Dance Company provoked shout-outs and spontaneous applause throughout the evening.

Dayton Contemporary, now in its fifth decade, reached back to 1959 with Donald McKayle’s “Rainbow ‘Round My Shoulder.” Set to sharply rhythmic work songs, it depicts the downtrodden weariness of a Southern chain gang. Six bare-chested dancers strain and push through repetitive motions. At workday’s end, they each dream of sweetheart, wife or mother. Although such a specific narrative may seem dated, the choreography’s stark intensity still resonates.

Lilli-Anne Tai dances to Stevie Wonder music in Evidence’s “On Earth Together.”

JOHN ROTTET - jrottet@newsobserver.com
Ulysses Dove's 1986 "Vespers" employs images of churchwomen expressing deep faith visualized in abstract terms. Six dancers in black dresses move from calm, centered stances to sudden outbursts of uplifted arms, searching looks and frenzied whirling. Their pains and sorrows are individually communicated, but they repeatedly convene as a group, providing strength in numbers. The dancers' precision and focus make for a gripping, emotional ride.

Evidence, formed by choreographer Ronald K. Brown in 1985, offers a distinctly different style, based on popular dance, African and Caribbean ritual and church revivals. The dancers move in easy, loose gestures, seeming to improvise personal, spiritual responses to the music.

**IF YOU GO**

**What:** Dayton Contemporary Dance Company and Evidence, A Dance Company  
**Where:** Durham Performing Arts Center  
**When:** 8 tonight  
**Cost:** $23-$48  
**Contact:** 680-2787; americandancefestival.org

Brown's 1999 "Grace" is set to a diverse score by Duke Ellington, Roy Davis Jr. and Fela Anikulapo Kuti. A male dancer and two female dancers in white and another set in red come together in various combinations, mostly dancing in their own worlds, working out challenges. The final section, in which all the dancers appear in white, takes on a lyrical quality of peace and benediction.

**SEE THE DANCE**

Find more photos of the ADF performance at newsobserver.com/entertainmentpics.

"On Earth Together," first performed earlier this year, has three men and four women in streetwise stances, dancing to songs by Stevie Wonder. There are moments of quiet introspection, but the choreographic approach is similar to "Grace" in its casual looseness and individuality.

Brown's seemingly unstructured works don't have the pull and drive of those from Dayton Contemporary, but dancers in both demand attention in their commitment to these contrasting styles.

music_theater@lycos.com