



## REVIEW: Fly - Five First Ladies of Dance @ Oberlin 12/03/10

### Fly: Five First Ladies of Dance @ Oberlin

**Not only did the Five First Ladies** of Dance fly, they also swept audience members right off their feet during the **Fri 12/3** sold out performance at Hall Auditorium in Oberlin. Sponsored by Dance Cleveland and Oberlin College, the performance featured five legendary dancers/choreographers who had hundreds of eyes and ears glued to their every movement and breath. We followed their decisive footwork around the stage. We raised our vision up and down watching each body bend and diagonal pose. Drawn in by the dancers' erect stature, willowy arms, flickering fingers, and expressive turns of their heads, messages were conveyed telling their dance stories.

Germaine Acogny, Carmen de Lavallade, Dianne McIntyre, Bebe Miller, and Jawole Willa Jo Zollar, African and African-American women, mature women all over 60 years of age, danced solo their signature pieces. These ladies already have significant careers demonstrating accomplishment and skill in performing, teaching, and creating dance work. But tonight, they went further exhibiting an exciting array of dance styles and techniques in the foreground while dramatic lighting, music, staging, spoken words, costumes, and video played in the background enhancing the total production.

**Bebe Miller opened the show** dancing her choreography of "Rain." Looking dramatic in her deep red dress, she moved slowly and quietly, seemingly heavy with thought. First dancing away from a large rectangular grass-like shag rug (maybe a grave site), she grew in confidence to dance closer to this symbolism. Miller expressed her story through dance, gaining momentum, to finally owning the stage at the conclusion. Since 2000, she has taught dance at the Ohio State University.

Germaine Acogny performed "Songbook Yaakaar (Facing Up to Hope)." Dressed in black knit with a black feather boa draped around her neck, she brought the audience into her performance. She began by entering from the lobby and walking down the aisles toward the stage chanting, "We need more women presidents in the world! Yes we can!" A strong presence, she encouraged the audience to join in repeating these words. Acogny is the founder and director of the International Centre for Traditional and Contemporary African Dances based in Dakar, Senegal.

**Remarkably, Dianne McIntyre's feet never stopped moving** in the next dance, "If You Don't Know..." George Caldwell, formally dressed in a white suit, accompanied her on stage playing background music on a black baby grand piano. McIntyre, a native Cleveland, set her stage well – a study in black and white along with a study in lines. Her twining arms mirrored the folds of her soft white dress. She is a 2007 John S. Guggenheim Fellow for Choreography, a

three-time Bessie award-winner, a recipient of an AUDELCO award (NY Black Theatre), AUDELCO Pioneer award, Helen Hayes award (DC theatre) and four Helen Hayes nominations.

Jawole Willa Jo Zollar danced "Bring 'Em Home" to spirited New Orleans music using a small white cloth as her only prop. Waving the white flag, she first appeared to be surrendering, but by the end of the performance, she conveyed positive strength and commitment. This dance is part of Zollar's effort to re-build the cultural life in New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina overwhelmed the city in 2005. She founded her dance company Urban Bush Women over 20 years ago with the goal of bringing women-oriented perspectives in front of audiences through dance.

**Carmen de Lavallade performed the final solo** dance of the evening, "The Creation." Her husband, Geoffrey Holder, is the choreographer. Poised in a full length flowing red dress, Lavallade gave us her compelling voice reciting the narrative of creation while acting out the story. We were with her every step of the way.

Fly: Five First Ladies of Dance, in its second year of touring, created a memorable evening for audience members. Hats off to the ladies for being so accessible at Oberlin teaching Master dance classes and being available at Q&A sessions. You Go Girls!! Bravo!!



**From *Cool Cleveland* contributor Susan Schaul, who says the act of writing is like assembling a jigsaw puzzle. The challenge lies in getting the pieces to fit together and make sense.**

This entry was posted on Friday, December 10th, 2010 at 11:28 pm

© 2010 Cool Networks LLC