

From *The Village Voice*:

“Ronald K. Brown's Spirit Moves: A choreographer slips behind the camera's eye”

Whatever idea inspires Ronald K. Brown to choreograph, his true subject is always the quest for spirituality and the freedom it can bestow. That's why his dancers radiate joy and power through the pressure of their feet against the floor, the lift of their knees, the swing of their arms, and the ripples that pass through their bodies. If you stood among them, you'd be bathed in warmth—and I'm not talking about dancery sweat. Heat runs through his marvelous performers like thick honey, making them pliant and resilient. Their pounces and rhythmic jitters blaze.

Brown's new *One Shot* honors the centennial of Charles "Teenie" Harris (1908–1998), the Pittsburgh photographer who chronicled the lives of the city's black population. People nicknamed him "One Shot" not because he was stingy with film, but because he knew that one shot is often all you need, if it's a great one. Harris's black-and-white photos of long-ago scenes slide intermittently across the Joyce's cyclorama during Brown's work. By way of an overture, heads isolated from their contexts swim closer until all you see of a face is one huge eye, the soul's lens.

Lena Horne gives the second half of *One Shot* its focus. Harris's image of her, reflected in a mirror as she leans dreamily across her dressing table, is the first thing we see, and we hear her singing "Someone to Watch Over Me" before the sweet ripple of Ahmad Jamal's piano in "Poinciana" takes over. One by one, couples meet to dance: Shani Collins and Otis Donovan Herring, Clarice Young and Keon Thoulouis, Arcell Cabuag and Khetanya Henderson, and Tiffany Quinn and Juel D. Lane. Brown has no use for lifts: The couples dance as if their rich, sensual, dug-in movement, with its African heritage, was a playful (but never flippant) dialogue that they enjoy mightily. Brown has made a terrific solo for Quinn, and when she and Lane face off, her velvety earthiness contrasts deliciously with his long, skinny limbs and oily fluidity.

The piece's first half contains some of the finest group choreography I've seen from Brown, especially in "The Meeting Room." The brilliant West African percussionist Mamadouba Mohammed Camara plays the djembe live. Several slides show scenes of 1960s protests and picket lines, and the dancers all wear workaday olive-green shirts and trousers (costumes by Omotayo Wunmi Olaiya and Carolyn Mechka Cherry). Brown has structured the choreography as an ongoing procession that people feed into and drop out of, yet we perceive that image as a procession only intermittently. We may notice right away that Quinn's solo echoes Young's, and then that the dancers always enter from the same side with the same phrase. We become familiar with deep, lunging walks, pushing gestures, and wheeling, bent-legged leaps. Brown keeps the stage picture shifting in space and alive in terms of rhythm and dynamics without ever losing the vision of a people united, ready to step forward when others fall away. It's a tremendous achievement.

Brown performs a solo in each half of the work, and some of his gestures find their way into the dancing of others. He seems to be thinking about—even addressing—the images behind him, as if they roused complications and affirmations within his body. Brown calls his first solo "Bellows," after the accompanying music by Jamal, and refers in his program note to the sparks that can be fanned into flames and release ancestral spirits. Although nothing in *One Shot* attempts to duplicate Harris's scenes, the first of three posed photos backing "Bellows" shows five schoolchildren, the next a slightly larger group of young-adult friends, the third a congregation. At the end of the evening, other photos rise up and sink down like memories, and the dancers congregate to watch them while Phyllis Hyman sings "Remember Who You Are."